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VOICES IN THE WILDERNESS



# VOICES IN THE WILDERNESS

*By*  
JOHN RESSICH



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BY THE LIGHT OF THE MOON





## BY THE LIGHT OF THE MOON

*Wherefore didst thou flee away secretly and steal away from me?*

—GENESIS

**T**HIS is the story of Jim Card's luck.

The popular conception of what constitutes good luck is the acquiring of money fortuitously—in short, to most people, it is what the other fellow is blessed with. Jim's lucky star, like himself, may have been a trifle casual, but it never let things go too far. Setting theories and stars to one side, Jim Card's luck was really himself. With his frank sunny nature, he made so many friends, that whenever he found himself in a hole some good fellow would rush up to pull him out. And holes were then fatally easy to get into in Paris.

In the old days in the Quarter, his luck was proverbial; notably in the Rue Campagne Premiere, that patchwork warren of studios off the Boulevard Montparnasse. But the pitcher seemed to have gone once too often to the well.

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It was Birchard who told me the news, as, with an expletive, he laid down a much-folded newspaper. Birchard is physically a big man and your big man generally has a soft spot somewhere. Birchard's weakness is an ever-recurring nostalgia for his home in the Middle West, which he assiduously nourishes by having local American newspapers posted—mailed he calls it—across to him in Paris or wherever he may find himself.

"It looks as if Jim Card's luck had taken the count at last," he remarked. "There's been a whale of a fire in Plunkerville and their Museum and Art Gallery's a little cinder. My! poor Jim'll be mad. I guess his guardian angel's made the wrong noise this time. Why, that's where they had his masterpiece—you remember his 'Town Crier of Maarsdrecht'?"

Yes, I remembered it, and as the truly terrible phase of painting to which it belonged is happily only a memory, we will not dissect the dead past. Yet the tragedy to the artist must have been real, for the picture marked the apogee of his career.

Although he did not exactly shout about it through a megaphone, in his early days Jim Card helped to keep the wolf from biting him by frogging out portraits of the citizens of Plunkerville.

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The process was simple. A photograph and fifty dollars arrived in Paris: within six weeks a life-size, if not life-like, half-length "portrait in oils" unframed but mailed free, would reach Plunkerville. He was a slick performer, was Jim Card—"Monsieur Card, vous avez trop de facilité," the professor at Cularossi's said to him one day in the atelier.

Once when on a visit home he actually painted an old lady's deceased husband from memory aided by her description.

"Ain't it just real elegant," said the old dame when she saw it finished. "That hat: that coat and that watch-chain, but my! how he has changed in ten years."

At the time Jim Card's "Town Crier" was painted, America was having one of her Support Home Industry waves, and the wave flowed right over Plunkerville. When it rolled along, Plunkerville was submerged in a floodtide of acute prosperity. The track which the Great Central had run through the district had brought the usual benefits of civilization to the previously sleepy little burg. It already boasted newspapers and tramlines, and the minds of the city fathers were beginning to turn from sewage to science: from

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appropriation to art. In this they were led by old Colonel Plunker, their perennial Mayor. Despite the wealth that oil had brought him, his mental horizon was bounded by Plunkerville. He reckoned that Plunkerville was good enough for him: he had lived there all his life and reckoned he would die there. The worst “knocker” in the town had a good word for old Sam Plunker. But in his reckonings, he further reckoned, that, before he joined his fathers, he would see Plunkerville the Art Centre of the Middle West, sir. Numerous other towns were similarly afflicted but that only added impetus to the Plunkerville Movement. When Whisky Bill,\* reformed, and the Art Hope of another Western State, announced years later: “No sir, we’re goin’ to stand pat on our own stuff in future,” he unconsciously plagiarised the Mayor of Plunkerville—and probably hundreds of others.

The desire to become an Art Centre has attacked many communities.

When the news that the building of the Museum and Art Gallery of his native town was nearing completion, filtered through to Jim Card in Paris, he became restive and despondent. In more than

\* The Plains. “Oddly Enough.”



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one recent issue of the leading Plunkerville newspaper, inspired references to him had appeared—it has been explained that Jim Card made friends everywhere. The hope was frequently expressed that some representative work by “Plunkerville’s gifted son” would be the first picture to grace the walls of the section to be devoted to the display of native art.

Unhappily just then the gifted son was in the throes of a more than usually severe attack of financial cramp. One of Jim Card’s oft-enunciated theories—he was a fluent and amusing talker—was that the impecunious should always avoid a multiplicity of creditors. He called his thesis the Concentration of Indebtedness. In practice thereof, he owed his concierge one hundred and eighty francs for rent.

In his building the concierge was a woman. She was a strident-voiced iron-faced spinster of uncertain age who waged perpetual feud with all the tenants and had just delivered her ultimatum. Jim’s pleading was of no avail: his pleasant smile and soft western drawl, which would have enticed the birds off the trees, were wasted on the shrew.

But, as usual his luck held.

Simultaneously with the concierge’s ultimatum

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a registered packet arrived from Plunkerville, out of which tumbled the usual photograph of a late-lamented and a draft for francs two hundred and fifty.

The situation, as Jim Card saw it, called for consideration: for strategy. Properly applied two hundred and fifty francs might affect his whole future. Yet the old gorgon knew right well that he had received money. All concierges in time become expert spies. She had learned from experience what these registered packets postmarked Plunkerville contained, and stated so significantly when she handed this one to him.

On what followed it is not necessary to moralise: this is a true story, not a tract. Jim Card had determined to paint a masterpiece for the coming Salon. Something so large and impressive, that when the fame of it reached Plunkerville, its leading citizens would pay so handsomely to prevent it falling into the unworthy hands of some other town, that his troubles would cease forever. He had lately heard of a paradise for artists in the neck of Holland near Haarlem. The sleepy little town of Maarsdrecht was then hardly more than a village. There everything was cheap: everything unspoilt and confiding. The leading feature



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of the landscape was, naturally, windmills, and the leading industry was apparently the raising of sheep for the successors of Anton Mauve to immortalise on canvas. In this idyllic retreat he would find asylum—or some person who ought to be in one—and create the masterpiece which, via the fast approaching Salon, would ultimately reach Plunkerville. If he left at once, he had worked it out that he could arrive at Maarsdrecht with two hundred francs clear.

But he still had to get out of Paris with his things and to remove his belongings. Medusa watched the only gate. Well versed was she in the ways of young and sanguine artists.

What a wonderful grindstone is impecuniosity for the sharpening of wits. Before the night was over Jim Card's plan was laid, tested and put into practise by willing helpers.

His studio was right at the back of the building through the courtyard. To have attempted to carry his furniture and belongings across the courtyard past the concierge's wigwam, would have been as sensible as sending her a note announcing the flitting. Besides, someone remembered that just then the moon was full, and the yard would be almost as bright as at mid-day.

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But right above the concierge's *loge* dwelt a sporting brother brush. After some cautious preliminary scouting, it was discovered that it would be possible to work goods and chattels along by devious paths inside the building to his studio at the entrance. From there, the conspirators hoped, when the concierge was tired out, to pass the contents of Jim Card's studio into the street and along to a neighbouring studio, where another samaritan would house them against the possible return of the wanderer. The noise of the removal had to be covered by a counter-blast. Fortunately for Jim Card, a vocal obbligato was the cheapest and most readily obtainable thing in the Quarter. To prepare the way, he informed the concierge that he expected a few friends along in the evening to celebrate a commission he had just received. He expressed a hope that any little noise they might make would not keep her off her sleep.

He was reminded of his debt and received a description of himself and his ways that would have made even a carter blush. His concierge would probably have disagreed with the Greek philosopher who postulated that suffering produces refinement of character.

A corner of the fifty dollars had been judiciously expended in importing sustenance for the

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volunteers, and right heartily they rose to it. About midnight the removal was stealthily begun while pandemonium broke out.

Led by two enthusiasts with wildly twanging banjos, the guests sang and yelled and stamped their feet as Jim Card's pieces were bumped and pushed through the twisting turns, while Whisky Bill's guaranteed genuine Indian war-whoops made the welkin shudder as an extra large piece was hustled along. Vainly the concierge shouted up from her window for silence. Other inhabitants, knowing what was going on, threw up their windows and accused the wretched virago of disturbing them and preventing them sleeping. Indignantly she denied the accusations. Every time she yelled for silence she found herself involved in a three-cornered shouting contest, through which the war-whoops rang and the banjos twanged. Bit by bit the removal went on.

It was nearly three of the morning when the full moon, shining down on Paris which never sleeps, saw the long procession of revellers move out in dead silence. Each shouldered something—an easel, a chair, a piece of bedroom furniture.

Two days later Jim Card arrived at Maarsdrecht. His luck was holding.

"I had forgotten all about Jim," Birchard went

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on. "I had been painting pretty hard, and was feeling all balled up and wanting a change. I'd sold a few pictures, and thought I'd give myself a look at the old Dutch Masters so I hiked over to Amsterdam. I like that place. Well, do you know, I'd only been there a few days when I got a frantic letter from Jim Card at Maarsdrecht. As usual, he was in a terrible fix, and someone he'd written to in Paris had given him my address in Amsterdam. He wrote and asked me for heaven's sake to come right along as between us he thought we could handle it. It wasn't money he wanted, but a strong man's help. I was glad of that, as I'd none too many chips myself just then, and of course I knew it wasn't a ruse. Jim ain't that sort. So I beat it for Maarsdrecht, quick.

"The boob had forgotten to put any address on his letter, but I didn't worry about that. I felt I wouldn't be long in picking up his tracks, so I took the train early the next morning to Laren, and started out to walk the four miles to Maarsdrecht.

"It was a bleak, wet gusty March day. The sky was a nasty depressing grey, and the rain seemed to have water-logged the whole country with its everlasting canals and windmills. Presently a



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red-cheeked gink comes in from a side-road with a little milk-cart, drawn by three hard-pulling cow-hocked dogs. The cans were empty, so I slung my grip on board, and we squelched along—at least I squelched, and he clumped in his clogs. Mighty useful things clogs in a damp country. When I struck the little place, I was pretty thankful to get inside an inn and give my milkman a glass of schnapps and surround one myself. I don't know much Dutch, but I gathered there's a store in the place, in the oil and colour line, that sells paints and canvas, so the landlord sends his little boy—they're a mighty obliging lot the country Dutch—along to shew it to me. So little chubby-cheeks totes me along to the store.

“Oh, yes, they knew the American Mynheer Card all right, all right, and I guessed from the way the oil and colour merchant spoke—he knew French by the way—lots of these squareheads do—that Jim had got into his ribs for a goodish bit. When he calmed down, I gathered that Jim was boarding at a farm a short distance away, and as chubby-cheeks didn't seem to mind the rain, he took me along. He told me as he trotted alongside, that he was learning English at school but didn't have much chance to practise. They're an

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industrious bunch, the Dutch, and I guess they're pretty hard to throw.

"So we struck the farm, and there was old Jim, hanging around looking as sick as a vulture in a cage, but he brightened up considerable when I came along. First of all, he borrows some money from me, and gives it to the little clog-walloper to cut back to his pa, and bring along a bottle of schnapps—large size.

"‘I don't care about going near the town any more,’ Jim explained. Then he takes me inside a great big barn, and shows me his masterpiece.

"It wasn't a picture at all. It was a monumental colour treatise on the Fourth Dimension. Big pictures were mighty popular then, but his simply beat the band. I suppose Rembrandt's 'Night Watch' must have set the tune ticking in his head. As you know, he called it 'The Town Crier of Maarsdrecht.' He'd got the Maarsdrecht town square for a setting; and, with the local town-crier beating his drum for a central figure, he'd crammed in every darned thing he could get his hands on.

"He seemed mighty proud of it so I said nothing unpleasant, but to look at it made me feel like I'd over-eaten myself.

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“For once, he had not been able to apply his theory of Concentration of Indebtedness. Except the farmer he lived with, he owed florins to 'most everybody in the place. The town crier had sat—or stood—for no end of days and weeks, and had figured it out that the fame of immortality was less interesting to him than prompt cash. He was calling daily just at that time. There were bags of others, but they were only what you might call interrogative when they met Jim. The town-crier evidently was distinctly importunate. He had quite a talent for schnapps—indeed, according to Jim Card, he was the champion booze-fighter of the district, and whenever he happened to get his load on early in the day, he rolled over to call on Jim. Poor old Jim had struck a trying proposition.

“Jim explained the position. The picture was actually finished, but so was his credit—and he might have to sit watching his masterpiece for ten days or more while it dried. However—Jim's luck again! I tell you if Jim Card fell down a coal-hole, instead of breaking his neck, he'd be pulled out with an option on the whole concession in his fist. He had discovered a friend in need. This friend was a young joiner, Piet Vermeer,



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who spoke French and lived with his grandmother in a mill about half a mile away. Jim had arranged to take the picture over to the mill through the night. The joiner had promised to keep it till it was dry, then he would roll it up and send it right along to Jim in Paris, where he could raise enough to get it framed for the Salon show.

“Now the joiner would not do anything more than store it—he would not take any part in carrying it over. Why he should do the one and not the other I can’t think, but there it was. The stretcher the canvas was on was amazingly strong, strengthened at the corners with iron straps, and so that we might get a hold without touching the wet paint, Jim had stuck a lot of ring-bolts round the wooden frame and let a half-inch rope through. It looked like the life-lines round the side of a lifeboat.

“While Jim was talking to me in the shelter of the big barn door, the little boy came back with the schnapps. Jim pats his head and gives him the change. Then he sets the bottle in a corner.

“‘That’s for my landlord to-night,’ he says, ‘old Jan Joost. He’ll be along presently.’ Then he takes me out to show me where the Vermeer mill lies and point out the road we would have to take that night.

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“Just as he was doing that, a little, wizened pippin of a man clumps along towards us. He had on a big flat-brimmed hat, blouse, baggy knickerbockers caught under the knee, and, of course, clogs on his thin shanks. He was muttering as he clattered along.

“‘Here’s my town-crier,’ says Jim in a flat sort of voice. That little man must have been worrying him considerable. ‘If I can put this through,’ he says, ‘I’m a made man and I’ll come back and pay them all twice over.’ And Jim takes him back into the barn. Presently I hears the cork go and pretty soon the old gink stumped out looking distinctly brighter. He takes off his hat to me, so I guess Jim had tipped me off as the rich uncle from ’way South.

“We had our evening meal before a roaring fire at one end of the barn, with the farmer and vrouw Joost and eight tow-headed, blue-eyed, apple-cheeked children. You could hardly tell them apart, but I counted them twice before the schnapps was put on the table. Except the biggest and the youngest, there didn’t seem to be much difference in their ages, but of course Holland is the home of this intensive culture that we hear so much about. At the other end of the barn three

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cows lay around in straw, calmly chewing their cud, and hens roosted all over the place. The smells were various and clamorous, but, I guess, pretty healthy. In the middle, opposite the door stood the picture.

“Whenever the table had been cleared, the children were bundled off to bed in a body. Each one turned and ducked its tow-head as they went out, saying: ‘*goede nacht, mynheer.*’ I’ve remarked that they’re mighty polite people, the country Dutch.

“Then Jim brought along the bottle and vrouw Joost produced thick glasses. We sat around the table in front of the fire, and smoked and talked—at least Jim and Jan Joost did while I listened to the gale roaring outside. Vrouw Joost sat like a fat doll, with a hand on each knee, and beamed on us. I thought the storm would taper off a bit, but it seemed to get worse as the night went on.

“Jim had told me that they were early-to-bed-and-up-with-the-sparrows folk, and he reckoned that a little schnapps would send them off earlier, and make them sleep sound. He was wrong. Old Joost began to get as merry as a coon at a clam-bake. Jim tried to head him off the bottle, but he was only wasting his time. Then the happy

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farmer started in to sing songs. Well, that's not strictly true, for he only knew one, but he sang it pretty often. Then he got up and danced as he sang, while his vrouw beamed till her eyes nearly disappeared.

"To the tune of La Mattiche—you remember it—he shouted:

‘Het hondtje van de slager,  
‘Dat was zoo mager.’

The story of the dog of the butcher that was so thin ran to quite a lot of verses.

"In different circumstances, it would have been an uplifting picture of rustic happiness and contentment, like what inspired the old Dutch Masters, but the hours were slipping past, and Jim began to look mighty anxious. And no wonder, for we had to get that darned great panorama across to the mill. It was good and comfortable in the barn, but outside, the wind was screaming, like resined string. However the bottle was finished at last, and we got them off. We had to make a pretense of going to bed too, so to fill in the time we packed up Jim's things to be all ready. I had not opened my grip at all.

"Then at last we heard the pair of them snoring



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through the wall. We crept back into the barn, and quietly opened one side of the big door.

“It was lucky for us that we had only opened one side, for the wind simply threw it back and nearly laid the pair of us flat. The gale swept into the barn with a swirl and splatter of rain that brought one of the cows to its feet in alarm, and blew ashes broadcast from the fireplace. We threw our shoulders against the half-door and slowly shoved it back. One lamp was blown clean out, so we relit it and looked at each other in despair. It seemed pretty hopeless. We listened anxiously to hear if the row had wakened the Joosts, but the snores of the worthy couple still rose triumphant in a discordant blend of bass and treble.

“We each lit one of the cheap cigars I had brought along from Amsterdam, and, after blowing the ashes off the seats we sat down to wait while the storm screamed and moaned outside. Our cigars were pretty well through before we noticed a lull. I wanted to go to bed and wait over till the next night, but Jim was all on the jump, so we opened the half-door again. It wasn't just such a roaring typhoon then, so we tackled the picture. Before we started Jim built up the fire.

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He said we would need it when we got back—he was right.

“Fourteen by eight Jim called it, and in the dim light it seemed like forty by eight. We had to put out the lamps, but the fire gave us enough light to edge through the door. We locked it outside, and started—Jim led, and I steered. Just like that night when Jim skipped it from the Rue Campaigne Premiere, there was a beautiful full moon, and the goat’s hair clouds were flying across it in scudding gusts. It rained in sheets, and the wind was pretty hearty. When we came out past the corner of the barn, a blast took us and we were blown flat down with the picture on top of us.

“That was the start. Fortunately we had held the painted side towards the wind. We crawled out cautiously and Jim said it was all his fault and I said not at all, it’s mine, so we took a fresh hold and started off again.

“Before we got clear, I think we were blown up against every upright thing in and around that farm. We must have looked like one of those pantomime horses as we lurched and staggered and the wind banged us about. Once it got underneath and I thought we were goin’ up like a parachute. Jim, of course, had planned a short cut

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over some fields. The first one we found ourselves in was turnips. I don't know whether the darned things had been picked, or pulled, or cut, or whatever it is that they do to them, or whether they were still growing, but they were mighty prominent, and the rain had made them as slippery as axle-grease. I never realised that anything could grow so close—Dutch intensive methods I suppose. Heaven knows how many there were in that field, but I fancy I sat or knelt on most of them. And always hanging on to that darned panorama so you hadn't a hand to break the fall. Sometimes we went over together and sometimes one went down and pulled the other over. We'd quit being polite and we grew hoarse cursing each other, but it didn't matter as the gale blew it all away.

“A diagram of our short cut would be interesting. We were tacking like a yacht beating up into a hurricane, and must have covered miles in one little field. However we crossed it—at least the turnips came to an end. Thank God they don't go in much for hedges in Holland. Jim had told me that the next field was grass. It may have been but when we struck it it was a lake with good-sized waves. I told Jim that a little more water wouldn't hurt the picture, and wanted to float it



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across like a raft. That made him mad, and we yelled compliments at each other while we huddled behind the masterpiece, and struggled to keep it from falling over on us.

“The moon was clouded over when we started again, and began to pick our way along between the water and the turnips. Then the moon came out once more, and we struck the road to the mill and staggered along that. Presently we could hear the squeaking and creaking of the old pins, and when we stopped and looked round the corners of the picture, we could see the whirling arms by the light of the moon. We worked around to get right down-wind from the mill, and finished in a stumbling trot on the lee-side.

“Young Vermeer must have been keeping a sharp look-out, and seen us coming, for the door opened at once, and we lurched into the big room on the ground floor. Late though it was, the grandmother was sitting by the fire to welcome us. A delightful old lady, with her snow-white starched mutch, she might have stepped right out of one of Franz Hals’s pictures. She threw up her hands in horror when she saw us, and no wonder: we were each just one animated mass of sopping mud. Jim’s hat had blown heaven knows where—mine

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was in my pocket and the left side of his face was all bloody where he had hit the cobbles, the first time we were blown over.

“Young Vermeer had humped the picture away single-handed. They don’t run much to height, the Dutch, but they’re pretty husky folk: he had forearms like hams. Presently he came back and beamed on us. They don’t laugh or make noises much the Dutch—they just beam.

“Then the old lady she was beaming too, and shoving hot chocolate at us. I’d be ashamed to say how many cups we took, and the more we drank, the more the pair of them beamed. Then Vermeer he toted out a bottle of wonderful rum.

“All things considered, we were feeling pretty good when we stepped out into the mix-up of the howling storm, but we had it on our backs this time, and we kept to the road as far as we could in the dark. We let ourselves into the barn as quiet as mice, and the noise of the wind gave good cover. We had meant to turn in and sleep for an hour or two, but we hadn’t the heart to touch the good vrouw’s sheets in the mess we were, so we kicked up the fire and stripped off our clothes to the edification of the cows and hens. We spent our time till daybreak cleaning our boots and

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clothes. Then Jim laid out the money he owed old Jan Joost, and we took our things and stole out.

“The wind had died down as we made a sweep to dodge Maarsdrecht. Jim wasn’t looking for that location just then. The whole landslide was water-logged and the damp seemed to have freshened up that strange scent of earth and warm new milk that I always associate with Holland. Every city to-day merely stinks of petrol, but it hasn’t yet smothered each country’s defined odour.

“Except for the slow creaking of the windmill or the croaking of frogs and an occasional cock crowing, there wasn’t a sound as we hurried along to the station. We wondered what the good people of Maarsdrecht—especially the town-crier, would think when they discovered that the two Americanos had gone and the picture vanished. But of course he went back and paid them all—in fact he married a Dutch girl.

“Well, young Vermeer sent along the canvas to Jim when it was dry and it got an honourable mention at the Salon—I guess Jim made sure the judges couldn’t overlook it. Of course, after that, Plunkerville simply couldn’t help buying it and, before you could turn around, they’d cabled the

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thousand dollars, and it was on its way across. But it sounds to me as if Jim's hoodooed his luck somehow—walked under a ladder or forgotten to say good morning to a chimney-sweep."

Unless truth were stranger than fiction many writers would starve. One of the first people I ran into not a week later at The Hague was Jim Card. For an artist he looked quite incongruously prosperous. He was much stouter than in the old Rue Campagne Premiere days, and harmonised wonderfully with his surroundings. I recalled Birchard's story of the ill-fated masterpiece and made haste to condole with the artist, but he cut me short.

"Why, that's the luckiest thing that's happened to me in years," he cried as he led me into the smoking room of the Hotel Bellevue. "The drinks are on me. We'll have two schnapps and bitters, *Kellner!*" he called to a passing waiter, "*twee bitterjes*," and without giving me time to speak, he pushed me into a chair and sat beside me.

"Why," he said, "that picture was a nightmare to me. Even when I saw it hanging in the Salon, I felt like hiring a fellow to kick me, but I needed the money—bad. I've prayed for earthquakes—I've laid awake nights scheming to get it away.



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When I was back home last fall, and the full horror of it struck me afresh; I rounded up the Committee and offered them their money back, or to paint them a dozen new ones—anything to get it abolished—and old Sam Moore got that mad I thought he was going to shoot me. They couldn't see me in it all, an' thought I was reflectin' on their taste. I've brooded over that picture till I was seriously thinking of hiring some anarchists out of collar to bomb the place.

“When I got that newspaper cutting, I felt like Sinbad when he gave his old man the final shake. Pretty good eh? Well the next mail brought a letter from the Committee offering me my own terms for one to replace it. Let's have two more—*Kellner! Twee meer Bitterjes.*”

Yes, Jim's luck was holding.





HOW SHE CAME HOME



## HOW SHE CAME HOME

*Some books are lies frae end to end,  
But this that I am gaun to tell  
Is just as true's the Deil's in hell  
Or Dublin City.*

—BURNS

**T**HIS is a sad and painful tale, with several morals. Beyond doubt many societies will desire to have it reprinted and distributed in the form of a tract.

It was, I think, Buckle who decided that ability to foresee events is the highest form of human intelligence, and, as Cranberry was generally content to immerse himself in the immediate present, Buckle would have found him disappointing.

That Cranberry should have joined the Royal Firth Yacht Club was the perfectly natural result of a worthy social ambition. The members, if not quite the salt of the earth, at any rate considered themselves the salt of the district. His enthusiasm, taking wings, then led him to the pur-

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chase of a real yacht. True, she cut no considerable figure, being only a twenty-one footer, but little fish are proverbially sweet and it was Cranberry's first essay. Had his enthusiasm not at the same time landed him into the purchase of a tripod-stand telescope, which he and his admiring wife duly erected on their garden overlooking the Firth, he might to-day still skim its waters, a free man, instead of—but to our tale:

Having taken over the boat, he only waited till he had got delivery of his “yachting suit,” complete with badged cap, to arrange an inaugural cruise. Conscious that he lacked any great experience in sailing, he decided that it might be profitable to ask the person from whom he purchased his craft to accompany him—a somewhat harum-scarum youth, answering to the slightly pantomimic name of Tommy Small. That worthy assured Cranberry that nothing could possibly give him more pleasure, and asked if he might bring his pal, Johnny Stout, a veritable bird of a feather.

Bright and breezy was the fateful June morning when the trio assembled at the club-house.

“Now look here, you boys,” said Cranberry, as he ushered them out on to the lawn, where for some

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function or another a marquee had been erected, "I don't know the meaning of this tent arrangement, but you two just sit down in it, and stay there and order anything you like. I'm off to get into my sailing things." So saying, he hurried away.

Presently the pair saw the gladsome sight of an ancient servitor shuffling across the lawn with two brimming whiskies and sodas on a tray. "Nice mornin' for a sail, gentlemen," he began; "aye, an' if this is tae yer likin', jist say the word. Maister Cranberry, he said I wasna tae stint ye." Swiftly two faces disappeared behind the tumblers. Simultaneously they reappeared, and Small said: "Couldn't be better."

Off paddled the old worthy. To and fro he worked his passage across the lawn, and without protest the enthusiastic pair strove hard to see that their host's good intentions should at least get a chance. What ultimately might have happened, it is difficult to conjecture, especially as the course the waiter was beginning to steer was becoming sufficiently erratic to show that he too had no intention of missing such an opportunity, when fortunately the reappearance of Cranberry terminated the proceedings. Somewhat shocked, not

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morally, but at the fact that he was being left behind, he hurriedly disappeared into the club-house. Getting outside a couple for himself to make up any leeway, he marshalled his forces and proceeded towards the harbour, where the good ship *Hilda*, dutifully christened after his wife, swung at anchor, her moorings having not yet been laid down.

As they passed the "Cross Keys" inn, Cranberry, hastily excusing himself—a somewhat superfluous thing to do in such company—dived within, and anon emerged with an enormous parcel, the shape and size of which would have caused the late Sir Wilfred, of ever blessed memory, to throw a fit.

Rejoining his charges, he hailed the club boat. The three made their way on board without accident, and presently slipped out between the pier-heads in what the fisher folk thereabouts call "a fine sma' watter breeze."

Pleasantly the time passed as the little craft sped along. Cranberry's parcel being duly inspected, healths individual and general were enthusiastically drunk, and the dead men marked the *Hilda's* course in time-honoured fashion. At mid-firth the breeze took off, and the water looking



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tempting in the brilliant sun, nothing would please Johnny Stout but that he should go over the side for a swim. Little knowing that the watchful Mrs. Cranberry, ever since they started, had been standing with an apprehensive eye glued to the brand-new telescope, the other two had a cheery if risky game of doing their best to drown the unfortunate Johnnie, by paying away and leaving him every time he got alongside. Finally he did manage to get on board, and as soon as he recovered his wind he proceeded to abuse the others in no measured terms, while the yacht hung about in irons. Having patched up the feud and thrown the empty peacemakers overboard, the *Hilda* was headed in a freshening wind for the haven of their choice on the other side of the Firth. Smoothly she swung to in the little bay, and the hook was dropped. As smartly as might have been expected of people in their condition, the sails were housed and all made shipshape—more or less. Having assured themselves that nothing wet remained on board, they hailed a passing rowing-boat, and, feeling that all they desired was worlds to conquer, they landed at the quaint old stone pier, once the starting-point of many a bygone venture, now the stamping ground of yachting enthusiasts and trippers.

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No one who has followed our friends' progress thus far would be astonished to learn that their first visit was to the first hotel they passed—or, rather, did not pass.

Into "The Crescent" they walked, and blithe was the landlord's greeting. "Here's a wire for ye, Maister Cranberry," said he, passing the buff envelope across with the air of conferring a favour.

Nervously Cranberry ripped open the envelope, read and reread the message, then, gazing for a moment in silence at his companions, he snorted and thrust the missive into his pocket, calling for his glass, for all the world as if he had been Old King Cole himself. Not wishing to appear inquisitive, Small and Stout could only exchange glances and wonder; then, as Cranberry was obviously becoming fidgety, they suggested a move. "Yes, let's go to Macbean's for lunch," said he, as they marched out. And to Macbean's, another of the village hostels catering for the merry tripper, they bent their, it must be admitted, somewhat faltering steps.

"Weel, weel, Maister Cranberry," was Macbean's welcome, "I was jist waitin' for ye tae turn up—here's a telegram for ye." The envelope

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changed hands. Savagely Cranberry burst the cover. Barely glancing at the contents, he snorted and sent the telegram to join its predecessor, and once more applied himself to spirit-rapping. Consumed with curiosity, but too much the little gentlemen to ask questions, the others could only stare at each other and at Cranberry in mute astonishment. After a long pause, during which he nearly pulled his moustache out by its roots, the obviously perturbed Cranberry turned to them and exclaimed: "Come on, let's go to 'The Bell.' "

"But," expostulated they, beset with a crapulous appetite, "we thought we were going to feed here?"

"Oh no," barked Cranberry; "damn this place. I hate it, and I can smell cabbage cooking. Let's go along to 'The Bell.' " And to "The Bell" they went.

Barely had they entered the inn when, catching sight of his visitors, the proprietor greeted them: "Ah, there you are, Mr. Cranberry. The wife was just saying you would be like to come over on a fine day like this with that new yacht we heard you'd bought. And here's a wire for you," he continued, handing over the harbinger we have all learnt to welcome or dread. Smothering an oath, Cranberry grabbed the offending envelope, and,

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without opening it, crammed it into his pocket. Overcome with curiosity, the others saw their chance. "Hadn't you better open it?" they chorused.

"Open it?" snorted Cranberry. "Yes, I *will* open it—come here." Dragging them to a corner, he exhibited the telegrams, each a repetition of the other, and reading: "Have been watching you return by train immediately."

"It's that damned telescope," bleated Cranberry. "I wish to Heaven I'd never bought it."

The silence which fell on the triumvirate was broken by Stout. "Let's go to the 'Sea View' hotel; there may be another for you there."

"Oh, don't try to be funny!" almost yelled the miserable Cranberry. "Can you see my wife wiring to a temperance hotel?"

Solomon's exhortation in his Book of Proverbs has, if not cured trouble, at least often made it temporarily less oppressive. So Cranberry, if capable of coherent thought, may have reflected, as we see him seated blinking in the sunshine outside the inn after lunch. But his recovering complacency received a shock when, on mentioning a likely train, "Not a yard do *we* go in any blighted train," said Tommy Small. "Qui' ri," hiccuped



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his friend. "You can get back to your lawful sp-sp-spouse b' rail if like; *we're* goin' to sail the" (duly qualified) "boat home."

In vain the wretched Cranberry, assisted, albeit somewhat timorously, by the landlord, endeavoured to dissuade them. The odds against him were too great. Reluctantly he tacked down to the little harbour with his guests.

But unexpected opposition met them. Not a boatman could be found willing to ferry them off. As energy-economising and censorious a crew as could be found in the kingdom, their virtuous attitude was beautiful. "Ye ought tae be fair ashamed o' yersel'," they informed Cranberry, "wantin' tae let thae laddies gang abaird in the condeeshin they're in; aye, an' you nae better. A fair disgrace! Tak' them awa' aff tae the station wi' ye" (there are no secrets in a village post office), "an' Wattie here'll sail the bit boatie ower for ye the morn's morn."

All concerned, however, had reckoned without the fact that the firm of Small & Stout, in any condition, were gentlemen of resource. On realising the impasse that they had struck, they had already moved off on a tour of discovery, leaving the hapless Cranberry to sustain as best he might

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the home truths of the boatmen. Stumbling along the beach, they captured a confiding youth spearing flounders from the bow of a rowing-boat. Too young and inexperienced to be other than anxious to oblige real yachtsmen, he gladly consented to row them off, and, ignoring or not comprehending the frenzied howls from the pier to "Tak nae notice o' thae folk," he assisted the precious pair to embark, whilst the boatmen, overjoyed at the diversion—the tripper season had not started and their off-season pastime of mechanically abusing each other was a little threadbare for the want of fresh scandal—gathered in a chattering group at the pier-head, in the center of which stood the woeful Cranberry.

With frantic haste the voyagers lost no time in getting up the anchor and hoisting the foresail. Slowly the little vessel began to gather way and the pair applied themselves to hoisting the main-sail. Lurching about the deck, Tommy Small clutched what he thought was the main halyard. Leaning well back to get his full weight on the rope, it ran through the sheave of the block and, not suddenly but gently, he passed over the side, yelling as he flopped: "I can't swim."

Fortunately no one had attended to the tiller, so



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the *Hilda*, having come up into what wind there was, was practically stationary. None too gently Johnnie plunged at him with a boathook, and after a hectic struggle hauled him over the side. Pausing for a moment to recover their breath and senses, a hullabaloo from the harbour caused them to turn in that direction. A pleasing sight met their gaze. A flotilla of fully five rowing-boats was surging through the water after them, for all the world like an attack by torpedo craft in line abreast, and in the bow of the foremost, in prayerful attitude, was the now thoroughly distressed Cranberry, gesticulating and chanting, while the boatmen, having no picturesque boating songs with which to accompany him, filled in the blanks with fearsome imprecations.

The whole thing was meat and drink to them. Not since the whale had come ashore on the West Beach, the previous November, had the natives had such a good day in the off-season. The day's happenings would provide cud to chew for weeks, and they bent to their oars like heroes, foam splashing in all directions.

"Quick," yelled Johnnie, "the foresail's drawing—get the jib on her: I'll look after the stick." Manfully Small hurled himself, all dripping, at the ropes. There was no mistake this time, and slowly

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the sails caught the breeze. But the pause had given the enemy time, so, making the halyard fast, Tommy lurched aft to help Johnnie to repel boarders.

All round surged the little rowing-boats, while Johnnie with the boathook and Tommy with an ash sweep kept up a waving motion which checked the boatmen's ardour. But the desperate Cranberry was still to be reckoned with, and, urging his rowers to their utmost exertions, he got close enough to grab the end of the boathook. Wildly the attacking flotilla cheered. "Haud ontill it, sir—we hiv them noo, the young scoondrels!"

But alas for human hopes. Poor Cranberry's star was taking a day off. Accidentally or otherwise, Johnnie let go his end of the boathook and the miserable man took an involuntary plunge in the very moment of victory.

Instantly the attack stopped and the boatmen crowded round to help the gasping, cursing, spluttering owner. This was good business. The *Hilda* might sail to blazes; here was a certainty of much immediate largess, with the prospect of more in days, even years, to come. "Aye, that wis jist aboot the time I saved ye frae droonin', sir," would be a sure two-shillingworth any day, and

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they nearly tore the half-drowned and wholly dazed wretch to pieces in their anxiety to achieve his capture. "Lea' um alane, wull 'ee—ah've gotten um!" "Awa' tae hell wi' ye, *ah've* gotten um! Tak yer haunds frae aff o' his feet: ye'll hae the man drooned!" In such fashion they howled at each other, whilst nearly rending him.

Whatever Cranberry thought or felt in these moments, he certainly gave the toilers of the sea a benefit performance, and, after all, we must accept some sacrifice for the greatest good of the greater number—and he certainly was in the minority.

Clearing the cliff and catching the brisk east wind, the *Hilda* slipped along and gradually left behind her the rescuers fighting like vultures over their prey. Their outcry grew fainter as the couple made all square and edged across the Firth. "It's a pity," said Johnnie, "that you got yourself wet—fortunately, I bought a flask at 'The Bell.' " "Oh, did you?" answered Tommy; "I bought one at Macbean's."

Fain would I call a halt and simply state that they took their ship over. But truth must prevail. Presently one "empty" splashed over the side; soon another followed it, and down dived Johnnie to the

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little cabin. "Call me early, Tommy dear," he murmured, as he disappeared; "when we're half over, and I'll take my trick." "Don't you worry," replied the resourceful Tommy, "we can steer her with a fixed tiller." And so saying he lashed the stick, and, snuggling down in the cockpit, calmly fell asleep.

. . . . .

A bump and the outcry of many voices wakened Johnnie. Up he jumped and banged his head against the coach-roof, nearly knocking himself silly. Recovering, he joined his companion in the cockpit, and, looking up, found that they were off the harbour, plumb underneath the starboard sponson of the good ship *William Stirling*. Hanging over the end of what he no doubt called the bridge was a person with an enormous red face trimmed with grey whiskers, and the voice of him filled the heavens. Never since the Emperor of Korea lost his bearings has there been heard such language as the bewhiskered one was using. Figure to yourself his feelings on seeing this apparently derelict small craft with flapping sails, holding up the traffic just outside the harbour. The two youths swayed in the cockpit while every passenger struggled for a good place at the rail. Enthusias-



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tically they answered the skipper's abuse, while deck-hands with poles shoved the *Hilda* off, and no doubt they would have worthily held their own, had not a low fellow of what the Apostle calls the baser sort appeared from the stokehold with a bucket of ashes, not yet cold, which he promptly emptied over the pair. Signalling "Half-speed ahead" the ferry-boat moved into the harbour amidst the laughter and cheers of the passengers and the crowds at the pier-heads, leaving the ash-bestrewn *Hilda* swaying in her wash.

There was still an air of wind, just sufficient to draw them in, and as they passed the admiring crowds on the breakwater, whom should they see, held, nay, positively clutched, by his, let us hope, adoring wife, but Cranberry. Swiftly the helm was put up.

Right across to the far side of the harbour they edged, tied the boat to the nearest mooring post and scurried ashore. As they hustled up the quay-side, carefully avoiding the proximity of their friend the ferry-boat skipper, they saw across the harbour, obviously coming round to meet them, two quickly moving figures. They broke into a run.

The orthodox finish to this over true tale would be that an advertisement appeared in the columns

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of *The Yachting Monthly*, offering a twenty-one foot boat for sale, "no reasonable offer refused."

It was not so. Cranberry still sails the *Hilda*, but mostly inside the harbour, and his sole companion is and for ever shall be his wife. Gone is his smart "yachting suit." He wears a plain blue reefer, and the only sign of a badge is an inconspicuous piece of blue ribbon in the left lapel.

An old-clothes dealer gave a tramp two shillings for an almost unrecognizable telescope and stand—he remarked that the one unbroken lens might be worth it.



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*To disembarass oneself of immediate responsibilities—that, my friend, is the true philosophy of life.*

—BONJEAN

**T**HAT our block of flats had worse luck than others with these war-time page-boys is hardly likely, and one became so accustomed to a fresh face above the uniform which seldom came anywhere near to fitting, covering as it did a strange back almost once a week, that I had not noticed the new-comer. On my entering the lift he broke forth: "Mornin' sir. No. 28's lost their black Persian. Five shillin's all they're offerin'. They won't never get it back for that, you know: ten bob's more like it," he added, yawning undisguisedly.

I examined the imp. Very small, pale, with faded hair and colourless yet sharp eyes, he might have been anything from eight to sixteen, and he looked out on the world from below a peaked and braided cap many sizes too large for him, but which his bat-like ears mercifully held up, with

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that expression of wistful virtuousness sometimes seen in the faces of slum-scouring curates.

I felt sorry for the sad-looking urchin, and in answer to my questions he stated that his name was 'Orace, and that he did not know how long he might remain. "Depends on the tips," he said, with pleasing frankness. "The money I'm gettin' ain't no catch."

Although I certainly did not invite him to do so, he strolled with me to the entrance door in Knightsbridge, where our Departmental car waited. The driver had the bonnet up and was fossicking in the engine. This appeared vastly to intrigue 'Orace, for he at once strolled round to the front of the car and planted himself there to watch operations. The lift bell rang. It continued to ring steadily, then angrily in jerks. I drew the attention of 'Orace to the fact. Without deigning to even glance at me, he said, "Yessir," and continued to gaze at the car-driver and the engine. I pointed out, perhaps a little sharply, that he had better move as some person was probably wishful to use the lift, whereat he looked at me reproachfully and strolled off, walking sideways like a crab, still gazing at the car. The lift bell ceased its persistent clamour, so I forgot about him while we tink-

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ered at the engine. Having got it to start, I was just entering when I heard an explosion behind me and turned to find 'Orace, still in the entrance, being assailed by an irate dowager of exceeding fatness, carrying a dog. I wondered how she had got down the narrow stair. "You wicked, wicked boy," she panted. "How dare you stand here and leave the lift untended? I have had to walk the whole way down." 'Orace considered her sympathetically. "I'm very sorry, madam, but I 'ad to 'elp this gentleman with 'is car," and madam turned on me! Fortunately the car moved off. Oddly enough, it was with a car that 'Orace got in his first piece of really fine work, but that comes later.

When I returned that evening Hollis, the caretaker, was in charge of the lift, and Hollis was unhappy, which grieved me, for he and I are great friends, a friendship that dates from Bletsoe's visit. Previously Hollis, whose fine manners and aristocratic appearance would have brought joy to Ouida's heart, had merely accepted me along with the other tenants, although the arrival of a case of noble proportions containing whisky at a time of painful scarcity seemed to produce a certain increased deference, but it was when Bletsoe spent



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a night at my flat that I really rose in his estimation. Now Bletsoe is a brave man and saved my life, which is a personal matter and entirely unimportant except to myself and one or two other people, but Bletsoe rode a winner of the Grand National, which is a national matter and of excessive importance. That he, Hollis, should have carried in his lift and spoken to a man who had ridden the winner of that event, and a race, too, that he had seen him win, raised the old fellow to the seventh heaven, and then I understood the litter of "early specials" and suchlike that I had occasionally noticed in his little office. Hollis had the national complaint very badly. I was then informed that he had not missed a Derby since Bend Or's and had seen most of the other big races several times since the early eighties, and I found myself promoted to be his turf confidant and tipster-in-chief. It was risky work, for I even mentioned a horse's name he ran out to have "'arf-a-dollar up-an'-down" on it. Fortunately (although, to press a piece of entirely unasked-for information on the reader, I never bet promiscuously myself, having had a look inside as it were) by the wildest chance I occasionally gave him successful tips about animals I would never have dared back my-

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self. So Hollis and I were friends and his family history was laid before me. Chiefly he respected a well-doing brother who at one time “’Ad bin clerkin’ for one of the biggest bookmakers in London, sir, before them starting price shops spoilt the business. Wye, given the customers, any Board-school child could make an S. P. book these days.” The said brother had for some years “kep’ a public out Enfield way,” and apparently was on the point of retiring, a credit to the whole family. But we are digressing from ’Orace. “Did you ’appen to notice that new boy as we’ve got, sir?” Hollis began, and I assured him that I certainly had. “Wot d’ you think ’e done? No. 28 lost their black Persian kitten and offered a reward of five shillings, an’ this young limb finds it an’ locks it away downstairs till they would offer more. ’E’s bin gettin’ ’imself and me into trouble all day, an’ wot can I do? Wye, if you as much as speak sharp to ’em, let alone cuff their ’eads, they’re fit to bring in a policeman on you. Dunno wot things is comin’ to along o’ this war an’ a Government such as we ’ave, always playin’ down to Labour.” Hollis, I would mention, was keenly interested in politics and as stout a reactionary as any Tory in the Lords, his *bête noire* being a person he called

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“Lyin’ George,” on whom he impartially laid the blame for everything. “Clearly the city is the place for that boy,” I remarked, “and that reminds me: I forgot to tell him myself—you might tell him to watch for my car, and come up and let me know when it arrives in the morning, as the others used to do,” for amongst our various “limbs” the unvarying long suit was forgetfulness. Earlier that evening Fergusson had called, and finding ’Orace, asked if I were in, adding that he had forgotten my number, a not infrequent occurrence, but that he, ’Orace, doubtless knew it. Like a flash, ’Orace, assuring him that I was at home, gave a number, and took him up. Not only was the number wrong, but the floor appeared to be wrong. Now these mansions, forming a triangle, were endowed with no less than three entrances, while the decorative scheme was unrelieved and the doors as alike as peas in a pod, so Fergusson mounted stairs and descended them, passed through endless swing doors, diffidently rang a bell here and there, and finally, after feeling he would never get out, he reached the street entrance and the lift. An elderly man was in attendance, but Fergusson desired ’Orace. “Has the boy gone off?” he asked. “Gone off wot, sir? There ain’t bin no boy ’ere,

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not since ten o'clock, wen I come on agin afte' me brekfis', sir." And then the explorer discovered that he had made a tour of the building and was now in Brompton Road. Then he remembered the number—or thought he had. He was always a believer in inspirations, so after a precautionary geographical survey with the old fellow he once more mounted and tried the bell at the fresh number. Receiving no answer to his ringing, he recommenced his perambulations, then almost in a sudden access of apprehension he wandered down the first stairs he came to and—found himself again in the Brompton Road. Nearly beginning to doubt his own sanity, but determined to interview 'Orace once more before he threw up the sponge, he walked round outside the building and, discovering 'Orace placidly surveying the traffic from his entrance, he accused him, not in bitterness but really from curiosity, of having misled him. "Yessir," answered 'Orace, shifting his feet and taking his hands from his pockets as if preparatory to flight. "Well, so far as I can discover, he is not in," Fergusson informed him. "No, sir," 'Orace agreed quite calmly. "This is clearly a quaint bird," thought Fergusson, who, fortunately for 'Orace, is generally more apt to be amused than



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irritated by untoward happenings, so he asked: "Do you know when he will be in?" "'Bout an 'arf-'our or so, sir," came the pat reply. "How do you know?" persisted Fergusson. "Dunno, sir," said 'Orace. "Well, I'll come back in half-an-hour and chance it—tell him that if he comes in." "Yessir." "Do you know my name?" "Yessir." "What is it?" "Dunno, sir." Baffled, Fergusson gave it up and faded away.

It was nine o'clock next morning when 'Orace presented himself at my door with the information that the car had arrived. Now it was not my habit to leave before half-past. Government Departments, as the war has demonstrated to everyone, do not take down the shutters before ten o'clock, unless in some "Control," where various interested "shirkers" or "indispensables" found it profitable to arrive earlier and remain later than their fellows.

I am afraid I said "Bother the woman," or words to that effect. "It's a man drivin' this mornin', sir," said 'Orace, peering past me into the flat, and light dawned. My regular driver would be taking a day off, and no doubt some ignorant orderly . . . "Tell him not to wait. I'll go by bus," and I retired for half-an-hour to see what the newspapers had to say in the interests of Hollis.



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At half-past nine I proceeded to the lift and rang and continued to ring, but no sign of movement. After the previous day's experience I was prepared for anything, so I accepted the situation as philosophically as I could, and hirpled down the stairs. As I neared the foot I heard voices, one raised in an angry falsetto, the other I recognised as the plaintive bleat of 'Orace. How long the duet had been going on I could not guess, but both sides were well under way.

"Did the driver say where he was going?" shrilled Falsetto.

"Yessir," from 'Orace.

"Well? Well? Where was it?"

"I dunno," said 'Orace meekly.

"You—you——" and Falsetto's voice died away in an incoherent jabble of swear words. Fearing homicide, I emerged into the passage to find a tall, lean, frock-coated person with the orthodox silk hat, eye-glasses, whiskers and black bag of a typical medical man stooping over 'Orace, who cringed against the wall. From the fragment I had heard the silk-hatted one had my sympathy.

Then 'Orace swept me into it. "There 'e is, sir, that's the gentleman," and he pointed to me. Frockcoat almost ran at me and squealed: "Confound you, sir! What the devil do you mean by

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interfering with my car? I am due at a consultation in five minutes and now I'm told that you have had the damned impertinence——” I had let him run on as I was amused at his voice—it interested me—but I thought it time to pull him up, so as mildly as any lamb, but, I hope, firmly, I said, “Really, sir, I can stand a good deal, but——” and then my blood did its best to go through the performance known as freezing, for just at that moment my own particular car, with our own particular driver, drew up at the entrance and stood there purring. The full horror of the situation dawned on me and I looked at 'Orace. He was standing there nonchalantly gazing at us with his lack-lustre but intelligent eyes. He looked quite sad—perhaps he was disappointed that we had not yet come to blows. “Look here, sir,” I began, with an air of heartiness I was far from feeling, “I can explain——” “I wish no explanation,” Frockcoat cut in. “I want my car!” he shouted at me. “Damn it, I never heard anything like it in all my life.” By this time we had reached the street, accompanied, of course, by 'Orace—my driver afterwards assured me that he winked to her, but she was a saucy minx, gifted with an imagination. Possibly he still had hopes of witnessing an assault.

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Clearly it was no use talking to him and he was too small to kick, so I again tried to soothe Frock-coat. "My dear sir, I know nothing about your car, but here is my car, and I will gladly drop you anywhere you wish." "I don't want to go in your car," he cried, spluttering angrily, "I want my own. I've a good mind to call a policeman."

The case was hopeless, and as passers-by were beginning to take notice, I stepped into the car. "Get me a taxi, boy!" he snapped to 'Orace, and just as we moved off 'Orace's brilliant impromptu reached me, "Not allowed to leave the lift, sir," and for once in a way his small voice seemed almost cheerful.

But it was the telephone that really afforded 'Orace the widest scope. Half the private telephones in the building were out of order and without possibility of being put right while the war raged, or dragged, according to your point of view, so that the hall telephone was seldom idle. Sadly and indifferently 'Orace would say people were in or out according as it suited him, and if he did decide to say "in" he merely set the lift in motion—if he could find no one in the entrance hall—and, capturing the first person he saw, took them to the telephone, then strolled to the door to watch

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the traffic. If he saw no one about he rang the handiest bell, and as he came on duty between nine and ten, the while Hollis breakfasted, he offered up some interesting spectacles of half-awake, scantily clad ladies, hastily tucked into fur coats and, on the return journey, doubtless after having had what are usually referred to as "words" with some stranger at the other end of the wire, eloquent with rage. The telephone occupied most of his third day: he only remained with us for one more and very little of it, but while it lasted he rose to great heights. It began with two ladies. On entering the lift one sniffed and remarked: "Funny smell—rather like burning." "Hope the building's not on fire," said her companion, with a giggle. As they got out at the ground floor two stout, fussy little people, man and wife, entered. "Ridiculously ventilated these mansions are; smell of cooking's disgraceful," said the man. "'Tain't cooking, sir. Building's on fire," said 'Orace in his sorrowful tones. "*Wha-a-at!*" screamed the pair. "Take us down at once!" and they babbled at each other. "Has the fire brigade been summoned?" asked the lady, as they jostled out of the lift. "Not yet, madam," answered 'Orace mournfully. "Merciful heavens!" gasped the excited



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dame. "James! James! at once!" and the obedient James hustled to the telephone.

In sailed a lady's-maid with three pekinese that she had been airing across in the Park. On hearing what the worthy James was bawling, she uttered a long-drawn "Oh!" and picking up her charges rushed into the lift, calling out: "Quick! Quick! I must fetch my lady." As they moved heavenward, the stout female raised a wail: "Don't go away! Don't leave us!" But 'Orace had started and heeded not. Into the building came a youngish man with brisk step. Hearing the howls, and having been nicely brought up, "What is the matter, madam?" he asked politely, at the same time raising his hat, all as laid down in *Tips for Toffs*, now in its eleventh edition. "The building's on fire, and that little imp there won't come back for us," she blubbered, and reinforced by James! James! they fiercely punched the bell and gazed anxiously up the well of the lift, down which portents of the coming storm were floating.

"On fire!" yelled the polite young man, and throwing deportment to the winds he dashed upstairs four steps at a time. In his first jump he barged into an immaculate person stepping sedately down, having apparently been unsuccessful



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in getting hold of 'Orace. "Where on earth are you coming to?" he asked angrily, as he straightened up from retrieving his bowler and started flicking it with a startling silk handkerchief. -"Coming to!" shouted the other as he started off again, "don't you know the building's on fire?" and disappeared. At that moment 'Orace descended and opening his gate the fat pair bundled in, yelling at him. 'Orace paid no attention, for the gentleman of the gaudy handkerchief was interrogating him. As you may have observed, anything other than his legitimate occupation always attracted 'Orace. "It surely must be in the east wing," said he. "Yessir," promptly answered 'Orace. "Oh, well, in that case," said the questioner, "they'll easily check it before it gets this length," and strolled jauntily out into Knightsbridge, while 'Orace, failing to find any other distractions, yielded to the pressure of threats and started the lift.

As the terrified babbling pair rose skywards, signs were not wanting that the youth who had sprinted up had done his gallant best to warn the inhabitants, and, mingled with the yapping of myriads of small dogs, persistent yells to stop greeted the trio as they mounted past the different floors, but 'Orace held steadily on to the fifth.

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Releasing his fares, James! James! threatening him with death if he dared to go away before they returned, the pair scampered off. They had no sooner disappeared than a whimpering fat lady turned up. 'Orace promptly took her in and started downwards. Her peroxide transformation showed signs of hasty adjustment, her amazingly high-heeled boots were unbuttoned, and in the folds of her fur coat she clutched a wheezing pug and a dispatch-case, while she alternately whimpered and shivered. Signs, too, were not wanting that she was not many minutes out of bed. As 'Orace slammed the gate, a despairing shout calling on him to stop echoed along the passage, but he passed away. *Etagé* No. 4 was dull, but at floor No. 3 pandemonium reigned. The landing was like the early hours of a bargain sale with frantic females, all in fur coats, and all carrying yelping, snuffling dogs, who jostled at the gate or strove to pass through the throng, a performance which was further complicated by two little old men who had succeeded in overturning a bureau across the head of the stairs and were, despite agonised entreaties, accompanied by thumps from vigorous feminine knees, crawling about amongst the dogs and ladies' feet, endeavouring to retrieve stacks of papers which had been decanted from unlocked drawers. The

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lift remained here for some time while 'Orace, carried into the back of the car and nearly crushed out of existence by the remnant-sale rush, was restored to his place at the lever. Placidly he straightened his cap while the passengers elbowed and squabbled amongst the dogs.

With difficulty I made my way downstairs while the building hummed like an overturned bee-hive. The air was filled with the voices of small dogs and women while the appearance of the floors recalled the palmy days of the Caledonian Market. Manfully I struggled on through ladies with dogs climbing up, and dogs clasped by ladies barging down, and finally, coming in view of the entrance hall, I found it blocked with a surging, shouting crowd of tenants with their pet dogs, and in the midst of them I noticed the venerable head and tall figure of Hollis with two policemen. I fought as politely as the circumstances would allow through the throng and the crowd outside, and going along Knightsbridge, I sank down in the lounge of an adjacent hotel and laughed till I wept. Fortunately I am known there so I was not ejected.

It was Monday and I had an appointment with a friend to look over some horses at Tattersalls, so after dropping in my letters at the adjacent post

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office, I turned into the lane passing along the west side of our block. As I came out into the little backwater, something moving on the left caught my eye as it darted out into the street from our Brompton Road door. It was 'Orace, jacketless and capless, fleeing like an antelope before Hollis. Such a student of racing form as he was might have known that he could not give the weight away, and age soon told its tale. He pulled up and I went towards him. "How's the fire going?" I asked. "My Gord, sir," was all he could say, "my Gord! The young imp of hell!" and in his anguish he succeeded in achieving the aspirate. I walked slowly back to the doors with him. Apparently the excitement was all at the other side as the entrance was quite empty except for one lady. She, however, sustained the best traditions of the mansions by wearing a fur coat and carrying two pekinese. As Hollis mechanically opened the swing door for her, a faint noise resembling the combination of a Cup final and a dog show came through. A furious outburst of police whistles brought Hollis out to the street again. We paused and gazed. At the head of Sloane Street the traffic was being hurriedly checked. Then came the climax. Round the corner swung a fire engine and flew past Lord



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Strathnairn's statue on two wheels: another followed and then an auxiliary with a squad of helmeted men took the turning in brave style—clearly James! James! had done his work well, and I wondered how he and his good lady were faring.

Hollis threw up his hands and with bowed head disappeared slowly inside. I turned back to Tattersalls, and as I did so a tiny figure at their gate, seeing me coming towards him, also turned and sped into Brompton Road.

. . . . .  
It might have been three weeks later when I strolled past Harrods. Something familiar in a small uniformed figure wielding a taxi flag struck me. Yes, it undoubtedly was 'Orace. He too recognised me and twisted his sad visage into a smile, apprehensive and ingratiating. At that moment the swing doors opened behind him and a majestic Kensington mamma with a delightful Kensington daughter emerged. Glancing at them, 'Orace stepped to the kerb, and stopped a west-going taxi in his old familiar dead-alive manner. The driver pulled in and 'Orace opened the door. "Gracious, boy!" said mamma, "*we* didn't order a taxi, did we, Mabel?" "No, mummy," cooed Mabel.

"Ladies don't want a taxi," said 'Orace non-



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chalantly as he slammed the door, but Nemesis was at hand. Out of the near side of the vehicle the top half of a frowsy, alcoholic driver appeared. Grabbing the unsuspecting 'Orace with one fist, with the other he seized the flag-stick. "'Ere, wot the 'ell's this, yer young swine!" he snarled. "Secon' time this week ye've come this gime on me." Still holding 'Orace, he clambered out, uttering language which sent mummy and Mabel flying. I passed on, and as I went a sound as of the beating of many carpets followed me. 'Orace was meeting his Waterloo.



## THE CORONER'S TALE



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*Then shall the slayer return and come unto his own city; and unto his own house, unto the city from whence he fled.*

—JOSHUA

THE rumour of an Armistice in the Great War had become a fact. Peace had broken out almost as unexpectedly as war and for the better part of the week London lost its head, while the Men Who Won The War showed gracious tolerance towards the Press photographers.

But not everywhere was the news welcome. War had become the national industry and the gangs of low-caste Caledonians and Cymrian sweepings that had swarmed to join the élite of Clapham in the mushroom Departments were righteously indignant at the interruption. Never had there been such a splendid war. True, men and even boys were suffering and dying somewhere for some foolish ideal, but unless they were supported from behind . . . It was a comforting thought. Timorously they had arrived in the Metropolis with their umbrellas, noses twitching like rats' for any scent



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of danger, but emboldened and flourishing under the lead of Cassius and Barabbas, the idea of having to return to their former ill-paid obscurity just when they were solving the mysteries of evening kit, the ordering of dinner in "restrongs" and learning not to call it a serviette, was a painful thought, and they fought as only such cattle can to screw their jobs down into permanencies or to hold them till at least they could cadge the label of their tribe.

With a helpful arm from Meredith we took our lives in our hands and, as fast as two crocks might, made a dash for an island in the maelstrom that Kingsway becomes on a November night. There our car had reappeared that day for the first time since having been swiftly cached early on Armistice morning. It was a precious car, a real English bus with power and comfort. Previously we had been running our under-staffed show with a wretched Ford which would never start the day's work until some of "Uncle Sam's Boys," who, fortunately for our lady drivers, abounded in Kingsway, had been delighted to display strength and skill with the handle. Having been started, the rattletrap then selected the busiest spots in London, the Strand for choice, to lower its raucous voice to

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a hiccup and lie down. Mercifully, evil men stole it one day from our very door and probably never in the history of crime have thieves been so fervently blessed. When we reached the cherished vehicle we saw our driver, who was as capable as she was comely, lightly gripping by one arm the smallest, neatest and most delightful Early Victorian old gentleman that ever stepped out of a daguerreotype.

As we loomed up out of the mirk he changed a leather bag he carried from his right hand to what he thought was his left, although it was our driver who caught it, and raised his old-fashioned silk hat as he spoke. "Gentlemen, I—I must apologise. I—I do not know—I—I find this place so bewildering and really——"

"He seems lost and thought I was a taxi," our driver broke in as if he had not been there, "and wanted to hire me." "My dear young lady," said the old gentleman, "I do most sincerely apologise to you and to the officers for my unwarrantable error, and if any of you would only be kind enough to tell me where—— Ah! there is one," and he broke away to run with funny little steps at a passing taxicab, the driver of which, of course, took not the slightest notice. Dropping his bag, after him

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sped our driver, who while talking to us had eased her hold on his arm. Retrieving him from underneath the bonnet of a barging bus and straightening his hat, she brought him back like a nurse with a frightened child. "Where do you want to go to?" said Meredith and I simultaneously, thinking along the same lines. "I—I wish to make a call in Queen Anne Street; you may perhaps know Doctor Ewart there," and the dear old soul spoke as if we were in a small provincial town. "I got into St. Pancras' Station about two o'clock"—it was then six—"and I am very much afraid that I have got somewhat out of my way; indeed, I frankly do not know my whereabouts in the least. You see, I have not been in London for many years and, dear me, how everything has changed, and I have besides received a terrible shock to-day, a terrible shock indeed."

Without speaking, Meredith took his bag and opened the car door, and as I assisted the delightful old gentleman to enter, which he did unquestioningly, our driver, grasping the intention, bent to the crank. She was such a treasure, and that is a statement made with conviction—we had had others. Just consider for a moment the plight of a little, frail old gentleman (I never discovered his

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age, but he looked eighty at least) wandering about in the crowded rabble of the streets of London in Armistice week for nearly four hours, carrying a bag, and unable to get taxi, Tube, bus or his bearings. Assuring him as he chirped his heartfelt thanks, for when we settled him between us he became quite talkative under the reaction of being rescued, that it was really on our way, he explained that he was only making a short call at Queen Anne Street in order to hand over some papers, and then he would require to go on to Golder's Green to pay another visit.

"But how do you propose to reach Golder's Green?" asked the practical Meredith. "Has your friend, this doctor man, got a car?" "Oh dear me, no! He is extremely clever, but quite poor," the old gentleman replied, almost as if he had advanced a qualification of distinction, as indeed it was fast becoming. Again simultaneously, in our anxiety to salve the simple creature, we asked him how he intended or hoped to reach there. "Oh, I—surely I shall be able to get some sort of conveyance as the rush of the day's work draws to a close?" "My dear sir," we assured him, "the rush is only beginning. Every taxi on the streets tonight will have a horde of hooligans and profiteers



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after it. But supposing you do manage to reach Golder's Green, what then? Are you going to spend the night there?" "Oh dear me, no," he answered; "I shall only be there a few moments, just as at Queen Anne Street, and then I shall go to a hotel."

It was too serious to be comical, and as Meredith had but recently been married and had gone to dwell in some remote suburb, while I lived in virtuous grass-widowerhood in Knightsbridge, it was clearly my job, so nodding assent to his questioning glance across the prehistoric topper nestling between us, I said to the owner of it: "Now, sir, you say that you have not been here for many years, so let me tell you at once that in London to-night you will get neither taxi, dinner nor bed. What I propose is this: We shall wait for you at Queen Anne Street and then take you on to Golder's Green; it is on the way to the garage so don't let that worry you." It was not, strictly speaking, unless any circuitous route is on the way, and I doubt in any case if he knew what a garage was, but let us hope the Recording Angel will let that one pass, and sixpenceworth of Government petrol in a humane cause did not seem much when we were being swindled out of millions daily. "After



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that," I continued, "the car will drop me at my place, where I can make you comfortable for the night, and we can be sure of some sort of dinner at the club." Hardly comprehending, he gratefully acquiesced, like the little child that toddles along with its hand confidently in the grasp of a self-conscious policeman. I leaned forward and explained in a few words to our driver, who, bless her, cheerfully offered to take our foundling anywhere.

Our troubles began at Queen Anne Street, where our guest found that he had forgotten the number, but vowed that he could remember the house, and it was only after he had spotted several as being his doctor's that a shout from Meredith, who had been drawing one side looking for brass plates while the car cruised up the other, announced our first find. True to his statement, he did not keep us waiting long, and tucking him in again, we headed for the classic shades of Golder's Green. Our Queen Anne Street experience started us early inquiring as to what our aged waif knew of the whereabouts of his second house of call. "Frankly," he said, "after Queen Anne Street I do not feel the same confidence. London seems to have in every way changed so, but I fancy I can direct

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you, and after all I have the name; he also is a doctor, so is sure to be well known in the district." His infantile trustfulness was quite touching. "There!" he suddenly exclaimed, as after much wandering we passed the end of a wide lane of houses, "I feel sure it lies up there." Swinging round, we passed up the road, but he could identify nothing. After the garish racket of London the place seemed like a city of the dead. Meredith the married was getting a little peevish in his questions, so, noticing a solitary special constable, I stopped the car and stepped out. With a strong Morayshire accent he announced that he not only knew the doctor we sought, but as the air raids were over, and as he was feeling thoroughly bored, he would gladly guide us there. We took him in, and having seen our wanderer pay his second call we were soon dropped at Knightsbridge, and Meredith with the driver passed on into the night and out of the story.

Only waiting long enough to leave his bag and give him the stimulant he so badly needed, I soon had the old curiosity settled to food and drink at the club. He was very silent during the meal, nor did I disturb him, but after his first glass of port he revived and began to talk. You must imagine

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his quaint, fastidious, deliberate diction. "Sir," he began, "you have indeed been my Good Samaritan, and I offer you my heartfelt thanks. I see now that I took much for granted in venturing to London alone at such a time. Besides the fatigue of the day, which I only realised when I reached your hospitable abode, I have, as I think I remember telling you and your kind friend, suffered a very great shock to-day. I am old, you see, and my nerves naturally are a little frayed, and for a time it nearly deprived me of my senses. Indeed, if it will not unduly strain your patience, I feel impelled to tell you of it. Perhaps you know what it means to feel that you must unbosom yourself and possibly you do not know the Dale country? No? Well, so much the safer."

And this is the Coroner's tale:

"I am a Coroner in a district there. No, we do not pronounce it 'Crowner,' that is a Cockney habit," he replied to my query. "In that country we live scattered about in wide, almost uninhabited stretches of hill and dale, broken only here and there with the sheep farmers' slaty dykes. Towns and villages are few, and neighbours far apart in that bleak country, and while some parts are truly beautiful and even attract occasional tourists, with

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its rains and keen winds it is not a region a stranger would deliberately choose to settle in, and with the young ones spreading their wings, population seems to slip back. Yet it has a strange fascination for those born there. In a modest fashion I have travelled and seen men and cities. I studied at Oxford and Heidelberg and Rome, yet I returned to settle in practice amongst my native hills and dales with great happiness, and I rejoice to think that, thanks to your goodness, sir," and he bowed with an old-fashioned courtesy, "I shall once again sleep there to-morrow night. Some years ago, perhaps five and twenty, a woman, one of the daughters of a long-deceased innkeeper in our little town, returned from abroad and took up her abode amongst us, bringing with her a boy, the son of a recently dead married sister, with whom it appears she had resided in Canada for many years. As she herself was unmarried, gossip, ever malicious, spread uncharitable reports. Has, I wonder, our much-praised civilisation and progress, with its worship of what people call success, improved us? I greatly fear not. My race is nearly run and sometimes I am compelled to think that I shall leave a much worse world than it was when I entered it. Yet one hopes one may be wrong, surely,



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surely——” And he shook his head sadly and gazed abstractedly across the room for a moment, then resumed:

“Undisturbed, although she could not be in ignorance of it, she devoted herself to the boy. Tall and strong and handsome he grew. Strangely taciturn, and mixing little with the other lads, he had one passion, horses. I am myself no horseman, although in my younger days I enjoyed making my rounds on a cob, but to me a good man on a good horse has always seemed a beautiful thing. There was nothing on four legs that he could not master, and people came to bring unbroken colts from long distances for him to handle, and I never knew him to fail. As his aunt had apprenticed him to a local blacksmith and wheelwright—you know, I imagine the kind of country artisan that I mean—the youth had his hands full, which is a great blessing for the young. He was also devoted to boxing, and with his animal-like quickness and extraordinary strength he greatly excelled, and would travel miles to have a mill with one of the professors, as they called themselves, who went about in the travelling shows which at that time were still common, quartering the country-side with their vans. I, of course, have no knowledge, but I



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used to hear people who knew say that had he gone to one of the great cities he would have won fame, but though several tried to persuade him, he preferred his own life. Wayward and headstrong, he would brook no control, and one day he quarrelled and actually came to blows with his master, the smith. Although he thrashed the older man, it meant that his steady occupation ceased, but it happened that a small inn just outside the town fell vacant, and with his savings and his aunt's help he was able to establish himself there, she keeping house for him. With that and his skill at horse-breaking and shoeing, for he was a most industrious fellow, he prospered. It pleased me, for I—I was greatly interested in him, and rejoiced to see such a headstrong youth settling down. It was about this time that he met his wife. She was the daughter of a small sheep farmer some distance away, which may have accounted for their never meeting till one day, having ridden over a horse he had been breaking for her father, he saw her, fell violently in love with her in his headstrong fashion, and they were married almost immediately.

“Although they both begged the aunt to remain with them, she returned to her old house in the

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town. Had she remained, who knows but that a tragedy might have been averted. Although there were no children, the marriage seemed a success. Then apparently a little rift began. Although I feel certain that he loved her passionately, he was outwardly cold and undemonstrative and insanely jealous, while she, as women sometimes will, hankered after company and little attentions. A strangely attractive creature she was, not precisely beautiful, but always with a soft appeal about her. I—I can think of no other word to describe it than the word *herrengeschmack*. I feel that one perhaps ought not to use that language after all that has passed, but doubtless it conveys all that I mean.”

I assured him that I comprehended thoroughly.

“Well,” he continued, “what I suppose was inevitable happened just as if it were in a cheap melodrama. Two artists on a walking tour—for I have told you that our country-side has a wild, weird beauty of its own—arrived one day at the inn and rested there that night. Next day one went on alone; the other remained. I only saw him once—alive, and he has left no impression—a colourless individual. I do not think he personally had any attraction for the poor, misguided creature. He merely crossed her path when her

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soul was in revolt at what she doubtless considered was her husband's neglect, and had drifted into it before she realised what she was doing. Who dare throw a stone? My house lies at a little distance beyond the outskirts of the town at the other end from where the inn stood. We call it town, although it is little more than one long, straggling street. As is my habit, I was one night sitting reading in my study on the ground floor. I am unmarried, and my housekeeper had long since gone to bed, for I was later than is usual with me, so when I heard a tap on my window I did not hesitate to unlock and open the house door myself. A country doctor gets accustomed to such things. The night was pitch dark, and coming from my lighted room I could not for a moment distinguish who was my late visitor till he spoke, and then I recognised my—my young friend, the blacksmith of the inn. At that time I had no suspicion of trouble in his home, and while wondering at the lateness of the hour, for it was past midnight and we are early people in those parts, I welcomed him in, for, as I have told you, I had a fondness for the lad, or man as he then was. He entered my room but did not speak. Without asking my permission, which he would always do, for his aunt

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had brought him up strictly, really much above his station, he sat down heavily in an arm-chair beside the fireplace, and gripping the arms he remained bolt upright, staring into the dying fire, still silent. I seated myself opposite to him, and then for the first time I saw his face. Although ordinarily I am not a coward, I felt a wave of sheer physical terror. It was the face of a demon, not a man. For some moments we sat there in silence, and although I struggled to ask him what had happened, my tongue refused its office. Then his eyes left the fire and, looking me full in the face, without faltering, he told me his story slowly, bringing each sentence out with a wrench. More than once I raised my hand in horror to check him, but he continued remorselessly to the end, sparing me no detail, and the light, not in his eyes, but behind them, filled me with a fear I cannot describe to you. He had left early that morning to go to a market town some distance away from ours, and from which he could not possibly get back till the next day. He seems, however, to have changed his mind when about half-way there and had gone to some other place in connection with a deal in horses; I have told you of his fondness for them. Returning unexpectedly the same night, he had surprised



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his wife with this artist literally *in flagrante*. He had knocked the wretched fellow senseless and, locking the wailing girl in the house, had carried him—I have told you of his great strength—to the smithy. There he tore every stitch of clothes off him, and screwing him into a vice on the bench, knocked the handle out, and going into his kitchen returned with a large knife and placed it within reach of the wretch's hand. He then went back for his wife. He threw the half-demented creature roughly over his shoulder and put her in beside the man, bound her to the anvil, gagged and left her.

“He rose to his feet when he finished speaking, and to have saved my life I could not have moved. Next moment, without one other word, he was gone. Recovering myself, I hurried to the house door, which he had left open, but he had vanished into the night. I called his name, but there was not a sound. I got back somehow to my room, and as I tried to pour myself out some brandy I found my hands shaking like those of a palsied creature. How long I sat trying to think, I cannot recall, but some time during the early morning hours I heard the sounds of footsteps running in my avenue. I started to my feet and reached the house door,



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which in my agitation I had left open, just as one of the local people ran up. He gasped out his news. The guilty pair had been found in the smithy by some person who had called at the inn. The man was quite dead when they got him and the poor girl died in a mad-house a few years later.

“To-day,” and it seemed to me that his voice dropped and he spoke more slowly, “near the railway station at which I arrived, walking towards me *I saw the murderer*, for that he undoubtedly was, whatever his provocation. He was dressed as a Colonial soldier, I do not know the differences between them, and walked as straight as ever. Nothing could bow those shoulders, but his head was sunk forward, and though he is still young his hair was white and his face the face of a dead man. He looked at me—no, not at me, but through me, without any sign of recognition. As he passed I saw that his sleeve had a number of those wound stripes, and he seemed like a man, too brave to die by his own hand, who had sought the death he would have welcomed and had failed to find. The next instant he had been swallowed up in the crowd. My God! I had let him go! I—had—let—him—go!” and placing his elbows on the table he buried his face in his frail hands.

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Feeling slightly uncomfortable, I asked him quietly what else he could or would have done, and in a whisper I caught the words: "He—is—my—son."

“SCOTS WHA HAE”



## “SCOTS WHA HAE”

*He is retired, to ripe his growing fortunes, to Scotland, and concludes in hearty prayers.*

—Henry IV

THE “Victory” Grand National had been run, and that great horse, Pæthlyn, had carried the top weight to victory with consummate ease. The Liverpool hotel smoking-room was packed with hot, flushed, strident-voiced sporting men—which is not quite the same thing as sportsmen—and the waiters never knew an idle moment.

In the corner farthest from the door a little coterie of sycophants surrounded The Nabob. Coarse, swollen and unlovely, his overdressed appearance and fine linen striking a painful note in contrast to his unwashed paws, there was yet that in the man’s shaven face which arrested the attention, and made one think of Tammany bosses, who, going over, through, or under, seldom failed to reach the other side safely.

A prominent “layer,” the deference of his cro-



## “SCOTS WHA HAE”

nies was their outward testimony to his success—your professional racing gentleman wastes no time paying court to failures. Although the favourite had won the big race, he had had a good day and was graciously pleased to unbend in reminiscence.

“Wonder wye you never does the Scotch meetings, George?” remarked one of the circle, and was proceeding to explain his reason for wondering when simultaneous kicks landing on his ankles from his immediate neighbours, and the deepening scowl on the face of George, otherwise known as The Nabob, made him, literally, painfully aware that he had dropped a brick.

“If I thought you was tryin’ to come it on me, me lad,” growled the big man slowly, when he was interrupted by a chorus of apologetic assurances. Mollified, The Nabob noisily finished his drink, drew the back of a hand across his mouth and grabbed a passing waiter. “Same again all round, an’ bring the cigars,” he called.

His august health having been drunk, by no one with more fervour than the unhappy questioner, who, under cover of the waiter’s arrival with his well-laden tray, was fiercely cursed *sotto voce* by the others, fearing an untimely stoppage of their host’s bounty, The Nabob settled himself in his

## “SCOTS WHA HAE”

chair, sucked heavily at his cigar and, in a voice hoarse with years of shouting and rich living, began impressively: “I’ve only bin in Scotland oncet—an’ that’s round twenty year ago. I’ve never bin back since, but swelp me gawd, if ever I do go, it’ll be to commit murder. ’Owsomever, as you, me lad, don’t seem to know yer ’istory, I don’t mind lettin’ yer ’ave the facts, *as* a warnin’.

“Me an’ Bert Fryer, wot none on ye won’t remember as——”

“Yoong Bert Fryer!” exclaimed one of his audience. “Wye, ah moind on ’em w’en ’e wor a yoong laad: ’e wor born not a ’oondred yaards from w’ere ah lived woon toime i’ Oodersfeald, an’——”

“Oh, shut yer face, yer blinkin’ Sheffielder,” blared The Nabob angrily. “’Oo in ’ell wants ter ’ear *yew*?”

For a second an ugly gleam showed in the assailed one’s eyes, and for another second he thought of plashing his drink in the overbearing bully’s face, but the earliest lesson your racing parasite learns is the futility of yielding to impulse. After all, he reflected, racing has its ups and downs: his turn might come, so he mumbled an apology and George took up his tale afresh.

## “SCOTS WHA HAE”

“Yes, as I was sayin’, me an’ Bert ’ad bin workin’ the northern meetings that autumn, ’im doin’ the clerkin’ an’ goin’ ’alves in the book, an’ not ’avin’ bin doin’ too well, we decides to go on wiv some o’ the crowd as was goin’ to that there land of ’ope and glory, an’ tearin’ a bit off the natives. We starts at Ayr and gets broke right off the reel, one favrit after another rollin’ up. Yes, me an’ Bert fairly gets it in the neck at Ayr, but we borrows enough to open the book again at Paisley an’ sorter ’eld our own there. Then we goes on to a place they calls Lanarick or some such, but lor’! they was bettin’ in thripenny bits *there*, so we finally lands at Musselburgh sufferin’ sore from financial cramp.

“Musselburgh! Blimey, to this day it gives me a pain inside if I as much as sees a *musssel*, an’ fer years the sight of a whelk-barrer fair turned me sick. Yer knows the place most on yer; wot they calls a prosp’rous fishin’ town, outside Edinburgh, wiv the track runnin’ round a golf-course on the shore an’ ’ouses at the near end.

“Well, me an Bert manages to raise a bit more an’ takes up our pitch in the silver ring. But lor’! when yer luck’s out it’s *hout*, an’ that’s all there’s to it, an’ each race leaves me an Bert worse an’

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worse, till, when the second last race was run, we was cleaned out proper. I was fer borrowin’ a quid from ’Arry Bates an’ goin’ straight back to Edinburgh an’ drinkin’ meself silly, but Bert wouldn’t ’ave it. So ’e unfolds ’is little scheme, an’ many a time that day I wished I’d choked ’im instead o’ listenin’ to ’im.

“We was oppersit the grand stand and the ring across the track, an’ back of us was the small stand, an’ back o’ that again was a long row o’ layers bettin’ in rags, bones an’ drippin’ wiv the simple an’ unserfisticated native. So Bert’s bright idea was as we should ’ump the box right down to the end o’ this row, which stretched diagonal across the course nearly touchin’ the rails on that side.

“There was only two runners in the last race, an’ as George M’Coll was ridin’ one, which was pretty certain to be favrit, we was to lay the outsider all ends up, wotever we could get ’em to take an’ chance it, Bert arguin’ that if so as it didn’t come off, we’d be runnin’ away from their ’appy ’omes, an’ them flounder-footed mussel-catchers wouldn’t be like to foller us far. Now, Bert could move a bit, an’ as I could leg it a bit myself in them days, I gives in.”



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“Ah, you wor aalways pooty good aal round, George,” said the persistent gentleman from Sheffield, in a praiseworthy endeavour to recover the market.

“There wasn’t much I couldn’t ’andle in me young days,’ said the gratified ex-athlete. “Touch the bell.”

A harassed waiter having done his part, The Nabob resumed:

“Well, along we goes, an’, as I thought, little George’s mount was favrit. Five to one they was layin’ in the ring against the other, an’ we was givin’ the locals up to *tens*; pretty soon we ’ad as much in the satchel as would ’ave ’eld down a balloon, but wot worried *me* was that as they brassed up their bobs an’ arf-dollars they stopped wiv us. Just ’ung round starin’ wiv their ’ands in them cross-cut britches pockets as they uses, an’ there they stands.

Wot bewties they was! Great ’ulking brewts, all cheek-bones an’ feet—an’ wot feet! Like them foldin’-down beds as we uster git in the cheap dosses at the Brighton meetin’s.

“Well, there we was an’ there *they* was. When the ’osses starts an’ come round be’ind us, I sees the outsider was only canterin’, an’ I looks at Bert,



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an' Bert looks at me, an' I sees somethin' desprit 'as got to be done. So I passes a wink to 'im, an' just as they was comin' up the straight together I starts a cry, 'The favrit wins! The favrit wins! A skinner! I never laid it!' and Bert, who was dam quick to pick anything up, 'e turns an' grabs me fist, shoutin', 'Well done, George!'

“So this seems to 'urt the feelin's o' them yokels, an' they clusters together an' sorter moves towards the winnin' post. Not as they 'ad an earthly 'ope o' gettin' there, but bein' that dam greedy, they was edgin' up to where they thought the scene o' their misfortunes was, so to speak.

“Wiv that I passes the satchel quite slow an' confident to Bert, 'im bein', as I've said, pretty 'ot stuff at sprintin', an' just as we could see the two caps bobbin' past the post, over the 'eads o' the crowd, the outsider winnin' easy—we 'ops it.

“We gets a bit of a start before them Johnnie-raws spots wot's 'appened; then they let out one despairin' 'owl an' comes after us. Straight down this 'ere links, as they calls it, we runs, an' after their first 'owl, them 'eathens never gives tongue. Gawd! I can feel it all yet. When we was runnin', I remembered one o' Spikey Nurton's yarns—'im as was up at Klondyke—about them there timber-

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wolves 'untin' in packs, an' runnin' mute, as 'e put it. It 'elped *me* along a yard or two that rekerlekshun did, I can tell yer. An' thinkin' on wolves an' things an' lookin apprehensive over me shoulder, I never notices a great yawnin' sand-'ole till I falls slap inter it. One o' them places where they puts them as is learnin' this golf business, so as they won't 'arm nobody, an' 'ead over 'eels in I tumbles, Bert, 'avin' seen it in time, swingin' round by the end. Through it I goes, wiv 'underweights o' sand in me eyes an' me boots an' down me collar, an' be sugared if the far side of it wasn't lined wiv railway sleepers on end. Wot a country!

“'Owsomever, I realises as I'm running fer me life, so over I scrambles some'ow, and as them blinkin' savages 'ad 'ad to come round the end, same as Bert, we 'ad still a bit in 'and. Keepin' together, we ducks under the rail, crosses the track, ducks under the other, an' on we runs wiv not a sound from them feroshus 'eather-Jocks bar the clumpin' o' their feet—an' I've told yer wot *they* was like.

“On we sprints, increasin' our lead 'andsome, an' feelin' we was goin' to bring it off, when out o' the ground from nowhere springs two young blighters wiv no 'ats, bare knees, an' red stockin's.

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‘Take ’im low, Hughie!’ sings out one, an’ wiv that the other, a ginger-’eaded little devil, makes a fly-in’ dive at Bert’s legs, an’ the pair on ’em does a regular catherine wheel. The satchel bursts open, an’ our ’ard-earned spondulicks goes buzzin’ all over the place.

“An ’arf-dollar catches me in the eye, just as the other limb o’ Satan plays the cop-’im-low touch on me, but I sees wot ’as ’appened to Bert, so I swerves an’ catches ’im a back’ander. Just as I done that I trips over a rock, an’ goes swoosh all me length in the sea, rippin’ the seat and ’arf one o’ the legs out o’ me trousers. I struggles to me knees, coughin’ up pints an’ pints o’ nasty salt water, an’ I’d just found me feet, ’oldin’ on to wot was left o’ me trousers, when a lump of turf as big as a steak-an’-kidney puddin’ get me fair on the side o’ me ’ead, an’ bowls me over again. I gets up, proper ragin’ mad, an’ was just makin’ a rush at this young swine when I realises that the crowd as ’ad come up wasn’t goin’ to ’ave that. One ’arf o’ them murderin’ ’Ottentots was pullin’ pore old Bert to ribbons an’ pickin’ up our money, an’ the other ’arf comes along the shore, tearin’ it up by the roots an’ ’eavin it at me, led on by this young blighter wiv no ’at. Stones an’ turf

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an’ them flat bottles which all them ’eathens puts in their ’ip pockets regular of a mornin’, same as the Dook o’ Portland ’ud say to ’is valley: ‘Fill me cigar-case.’ ”

“But wot *was* they, George?” asked one horrified listener.

“Oh, I found out after wot they was, all right,” answered The Nabob. “There’s a wicked old man in them parts as runs a semingnary fer young toffs. ’E trains ’em special to go about wiv their ’eads an’ their knees ’an gawd knows wot else bare: feeds ’em on iron filings an’ other strengthenin’ foods, an’ turns ’em out as big as men an’ strong as bull calves. An’ them two, instead o’ being indoors nice an’ proper, doin’ their little sums an’ writin’ up their copy-books, ’ad sneaked out to see the racin’, an’ out o’ pure cussedness, interferes wiv me an’ Bert, just as we—— Oh, dammit! touch that bell,” and, overcome by the recollection, he spat fiercely and drained his glass.

The waiter having filled in the pause, he continued:

“Every time I tries to get ashore they starts volleyin’ at me. Forchunately the water wasn’t deep, so I could get outer range wivout ’avin’ to swim, which I can’t do, but, gostrewth! think of it.



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Me best pal murdered before me very eyes by them cannibals: me up to me middle in the sea wiv 'arf me trousers gone an' bung full o' sand an' sickenin' salt water, an' no prospect o' gettin' out wiv 'undreds an' 'undreds of 'em waitin' to kill me.

“ 'Owsomever, I couldn't *live* there, so I starts to move on a bit, but blimey! if they didn't follow me up. Twice I pitches into 'oles an' goes over me 'ead, them reptiles cheerin' like 'ell each time. Wot a country! Well, this goes on, me workin' along the beach, an' after it come down darkish they petered off, an' I gets ashore 'arf dead, among some rocks an' 'ouses, 'avin' come right the 'ole length o' the course in the water.

“Perishin' wiv cold, I sets down where I can't be seen an' takes stock o' the situation, so to speak. I was examinin' me rewined trousers when I spots a pair 'angin' up on a rope in a backyard sort o' place. Well, thinks I, that's a start, anyhow, an' as soon as it was proper dark I nips in an' 'as 'em, an' drags 'em on over me own. Strike me lucky if I don't think they must 'ave bin made fer a blinkin' elephant. 'Owsomever, they covered me, an' I feels better already.”

“Ah, you wor aalways a good-plooked 'un, George,” chipped in the determined Sheffielder.



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“Well, anyhow, I ’ad to get a move on, but I was fair dyin’ fer just—one—drink. Of course I ’adn’t a bean, but creepin’ along in the shadows, the streets bein’ quiet, I spots a nice little pub. I looks in—empty, an’ only a lad in charge, rubbin’ up some glasses. I knew ’e couldn’t leave the place, so in I goes. ‘Evenin’, matey,’ I sez, as ‘earty-like as I could on me diet o’ sand an’ salts, ‘glass o’ whisky,’ makin’ believe to dive fer me pocket wiv the ’and as wasn’t ’oldin’ up the yards o’ the slack o’ me pants. ’E looks funny-like at me, but sets down the drink, which I grabs an’ tosses off neat. Fair scorched me throat, it did, but I can feel the effect o’ that life-savin’ drink now. Then I gathers ’e’s sayin’ somethin’, though ’eavin knows wot gibberish ’e was gettin’ rid of.”

“It’s a dialect them Scotties speaks, same as the Maoris an’ that lot,” said a travelled member of his audience.

“P’raps you’re right, but I wasn’t stoppin’ there long enough to learn it. I sees it was up to me to make a quick get-away, so I turns round an’ pretends to spot some pals through the glass door—starts an imaginary conversation through the door which I ’arf opened, then slips out an’ runs like ’ell, ’oldin’ me pants in me two ’ands. I did ’ear

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the pore lad callin' out doleful, but I knew as 'e couldn't leave the place, so I gets away safe over a bridge. Still keepin' in the shadows, I soon gets clear o' the blasted death-trap. I sees lights ahead: miles an' miles ahead. I wasn't sure of me direction, but as it was suicide to try the railway station I trudges on in the dark. I passes dwellin'-'ouses now an' then, but by keepin' well down by the shore I gets through all right. Then I passes a pier like Brighton, but nothin' lookin' like Edinburgh. Finally I strikes a road wot didn't seem to 'ave no beginnin' nor no end, wiv no lamps, an' 'undreds an' thousands o' rats squealin' all over the place an' me alone. Proper terrified I was, I give yer me word, but the thought o' them cannibals behind pushed me on. I crosses a railway line an' presently strikes streets again. I passes one or two likely pubs, but on poppin' me 'ead in I sees it wasn't no place fer me—crowded to the door they was wiv people singin' an' fightin', so I drags on me weary way till I comes to a bit o' grass an' a flag-pole an two or three streets convergin', the place as lively as a cemetery, that quiet it was. I sets down on a doorstep, an' when a rozzer comes up I was that done in, I didn't try to get away.

“ 'E considers me fer a bit, turnin' 'is lantern on

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me, then 'e starts 'is gibberish. 'Wor did ye git they claze,' was wot 'e sez, an' I can remember it word fer word now, fer 'e kep' on repeatin' of it, but wot in 'ell 'e meant fair beat me, till 'e starts 'andlin me 'orrible britches, then I rumbles. I starts pitchin' a tale about 'avin' bin shipwrecked, when swelp me 'e turns 'is lantern off an' starts laughin'. I must 'ave bin a sight, too, but imagine a Scotchman seein' a joke. So we gets matey, as far as people speakin' different langwidges can, an' I sez, 'Friends—Edinburgh.' 'Oh, Edinburgh?' 'e sez, an' 'e starts explainin' an' pointin', an' I gathers 'e's tellin' me where it lays an' that I've gotter take a tram car—'cawr' 'e called it—an' may I die, when I gets 'im ter understand as I'm stony broke, if 'e doesn't shake out a deuce o' browns an' 'ands 'em over still chucklin'. That's somethin' to remember, a blinkin' Scotchman givin' away money.

“Presently I sees an antidelooonian bus shovin' a pair o' crocks along the rails in the middle o' the street, so on I gets, an' not desirin' much attention, I goes outside an' sets there shiverin', an' cursin' me luck, an' thinkin' about pore Bert, an' all the while we goes miles an' miles up a great dam 'ill wiv 'undreds o' pubs on both sides o' this ever-

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lastin’ street, which was crowded wiv people fightin’ an’ singin’. *Wot* a country!

“After stoppin’ a few times to take out the ’arf-dead nags an’ ’itch on more, we reaches the top, doin’ the last ’arf-mile at a walk—an’ me dyin’ wiv cold. Then I reckernises the Register ’Ouse, an’ I knew as I’d find me pals at the little club at the back, but the trouble was ’ow to get there. There was millions an’ millions more people about, all drunk an’ all singin’ an’ fightin’, so I ’opes to slip through wivout attractin’ much notice to meself—but nothin’ doin’. A couple o’ newsboys spots me an’ starts a tallyo, an’ in ’arf-a-mo’ we ’as a crowd round like an execution, an’ me playin’ principal boy. A couple of rozzers comes through an’ grabs me, an’ was just marchin’ me off, when up comes Danny Sullivan. Wot ’e said or done I dunno, but ’e was always smart enough to whisper the fleas off a dog’s ear, so ’e gets me away, chokin’ wiv laughin’, an’ shoves me in a quiet doorway.

“ ‘George,’ sez ’e, shakin’ all over like a lump o’ potted meat, ‘wot’s ’appened?’ So I tells ’im, brief. ‘George,’ sez ’e, fishin’ out a bundle o’ them Scotch notes, an’ peelin’ off five, ‘there’s a fiver, straight, if you’ll come up to the club an’ let the boys see yer *as you are*.’ Well, I was tryin’ to go



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there anyway, so I reckon that was me first bit o' luck. Up 'e 'elps me, an' never in me life did I 'ear such a scream o' laughter as went up when I goes in. Nobody 'adn't 'eard anything o' pore Bert, so I'd given 'im up, when I runs across 'im at Gosforth Park a bit later, lookin' the pictur' o' misery in a suit 'e'd borrowed, which was three sizes too big. 'E 'ad a face like a rainbow, 'is left arm in a sling, an' 'im limpin' about, leanin' 'eavy on a stick. 'George,' 'e whispers, lookin' at me dismal outer 'is one eye as wasn't bunged up, an' shakin' 'is 'ead solemn, 'I'm through wiv racin'—an' 'e was. They'd a whip round fer 'im soon after, an' he went off to New Zealand that same month.

“Well, I never gives up 'ope o' gettin' square wiv that there schoolmaster, an' when them suf-ridge wimmin starts burnin' 'ouses down I thinks I sees me chance. So one day I takes a 'ansom down to their place in Lincoln's Inn an' looks in, an' sez I wants to give 'em a 'andsome subscripshun. Lumme, funds must 'ave bin low, fer they was all over me, some 'arf-dozen on 'em, but when I sez wot I wants done in return for it, they fair sets about me wiv their tongues, 'eaded by one purple-faced old 'en. Knowin' wot they was capable of, I



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beats a 'asty retreat, this crimson rambler 'ard after me, callin' out fer me to be ashamed o' me-self. 'It's you men,' she yells—'strewth! I thought she'd be stickin' a 'atpin inter me if I wasn't dam quick. 'It's you men that's the cause of all the trouble,' she screams, comin' right out inter the street. 'Yes,' I shouts back at 'er, 'an' your trouble is that yer can't git one'—an' bolts.

“An' just to think, if it 'adn't bin fer them two young —— Dammit! Touch the bell, somebody.”



## A TRAGEDY



## A TRAGEDY

*The short and simple annals of the poor.*

—THOMAS GRAY

FOR two consecutive Saturdays, always at the same hour of the evening, the haunting strains of that old negro melody "Swanee River" had made those sitting round the well-appointed dinner table feel slightly uncomfortable, not to say ashamed, of their atmosphere of warmth and comfort. Mid-winter Saturday evenings out of doors in that industrial city are normally an unpleasant and cheerless combination of wet, cold and gloom, heartlessly accentuated by the smack of harsh electric lamps. It was a woman's voice of that almost indefinable quality that we call refined. The faint notes barely penetrated the heavy old-fashioned closely-drawn curtains, as the singer passed quickly down the terrace. Street singers were few in the district, which was an unintentional mercy. Supplicants for aid were usually more direct in their methods. The "undeserving poor" abounded. That plausible



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and often aggressive under layer of society, the jetsam, who from chronic inertia and congenital ineptitude, batten on the often misguided charity of others.

Despite the wailing of romanticists over the decay of Beggars, the residents at times felt the need for someone to emulate that capable man James the Second (he of Scotland) in his “staunching” of those “masterful beggars and pretended fools.”

Yet the unspoken appeal behind the words of the old song could not be ignored. When on the third consecutive and wet Saturday the touching lament:

*“All the world am sad and dreary”*

drifted past, one of those at table remarked, “There’s poor Melba again” and a messenger was hastily despatched to bring the singer in.

The ladies of the house interviewed the poor creature in the hall. The master of the house continued his dinner. He had his own personal retinue of insatiable pensioners to support and he observed caustically that his existing monthly price of peace from the tale-pitching brotherhood was sufficient—he would leave the gentle sex to his woman-folk. When he passed through the hall

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after dinner and, sniffing indignantly, remarked that the plumbers must be telephoned for in the morning to examine the drains, it was the only unkind word ever spoken about poor Mrs. Maclarty. And in truth she carried about with her a ripe natural odour like a whole cageful of young foxes.

So far as a casual observer might judge, she never changed her raiment: what it covered one shuddered to think.

She always wore an old-fashioned mauve bonnet and an older-fashioned all-embracing mantle. In general outward appearance she had an extraordinary resemblance to Nicholson's drawing of the late and ever-to-be-lamented Queen Victoria.

Her pitiful tale was the sad and sordid story of desertion by a drunken brute of a husband. She had been a governess in a county family—which may have accounted for her refined speech—and, against her parents' wishes, had made a runaway marriage with a callous thriftless scoundrel, who, after dragging her down to the depths had left her penniless and gone, she believed, to America. Stranded with three children she bravely struggled for a bare existence for them and for herself, by working at odd jobs outside during the day and at home far into the night, to keep them in decency.

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A chronic sore on one leg, the result of her husband's boot, prevented her securing regular work as she had to attend every other day at the infirmary to have it dressed.

Yet always, when she was welcomed in the hall by the lady of the house, she bobbed a curtsey and curtseyed again on leaving. She told her tragic story so simply and quietly that it would have moved Nero to pity. Forced to live in poverty-stricken squalor, from the conscious or instinctive superiority the educated poor cannot help feeling in such surroundings, and for her children's sake, she kept aloof from her neighbours, attending church regularly despite their taunts.

Her three children, a little girl and two small boys, she was fortunately able to teach herself, pathetically hoping against hope that she might one day find herself earning enough to be able to send them to some school, where the good manners she strove to inculcate at home might not be corrupted by the urchins of the gutter, with whom she would not allow them to mix. She felt the bitterness of the constant inquisitions of the School Board Inspectors, whose task it is to see that the full benefits and blessings of free education do not go astray.

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She never begged. It was obvious that the miserable woman felt her position keenly, for, although she had received every material and verbal encouragement to do so, she passed quickly the following Saturday evening without coming to the door of the house. She was only induced to come in on the next Saturday by again sending a messenger. The poor soul confessed through her sobs that begging was so distasteful and repugnant to her, that had it not been for her children's sake, she would long ago have given up the hopeless fight and sought oblivion in the river. Often and often, she told the ladies, she had heart-brokenly trailed round the houses of the terraces in the wet and bitter cold, wistfully envious of the lights and warmth within, and not a door had been opened to her. Her patient resignation under the cruel hardships of her lot, and the rank injustices of life, made one wonder for what we are called upon to give praise to Jehovah.

But after the ice of her reserve had been broken she called regularly on her kindly patrons. By then she was made to feel in the subtle fashion of which only true gentlefolk have the gift, that she was not being used as a conscience-salving charity rag-bag. Not in the manner that the smug, successful



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sweater, having purchased his peerage, endows and embellishes the House of God, thereby achieving additional merit on this earth, and hopeful of mitigating possibilities, which loom unpleasantly as he nears his end.

They were genuinely interested in the stricken woman's plucky struggle to bring up her children. Thanks to them she could now send the little ones decently clothed to the respectable school she had longed for. With growing pride she would tell the ladies of their progress at day and Sunday schools when she made her weekly call. Gladly and gratefully would she accept old garments from them, and it is to be feared that the pensioners of the master of the house suffered through the untimely abstractions of cast-off tweeds intended for them. The two elder children—wee Tommy and wee Ailie, as she, with the lower class Scot's delight in the abominable diminutive, would call them—were healthy high-spirited youngsters whose romps kept their harassed mother in a constant state of patching, but the younger boy, wee Willie, was a continual anxiety. Insufficient nourishment from birth, that supreme tragedy of the poor who fiercely resent charity, seemed to have permanently impaired the child's stamina.



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Although her new-found helpers had made her load so light by contrast to the hell of the past, that she assured them life seemed like Heaven, poor little Willie was always ailing, and despite the help she got of jellies, fruit and other delicacies, it made sore inroads on the hard wrought mother's scanty garnerings. Still she struggled on and Winter succeeded Winter.

As each Spring came round and days lengthened, her weekly call became later and later in the evening. Her pride was such that to have saved her life she could not have sung in the streets, unless under cover of the friendly darkness or dusk. Nor would she hear of it when once or twice the ladies volunteered to visit her home or tried to persuade her to bring her little ones to the hospitable house. She could not bear the idea of their seeing the surroundings in which she and the children had to exist, but above all, she recoiled from the idea of her family knowing that they were so dependent on charity. Respecting the good woman's feelings the matter was not pressed.

Yet, while it was the charitable family's custom to spend the Summer and Autumn months in the country, the thoughtful lady of the house never forgot to make provision during her absence for

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her less fortunate sister. And year followed year.

There came a Winter when Tommie, no longer wee, was soon to be apprenticed to a plumber, whilst the girl Ailie, anxious as her mother was to keep her at home, would soon have to go out to work, for the younger boy required such unremitting attention that the mother had now often to allow days to pass attending him; days when she could not work and so reluctantly became more and more dependent on the charity of her kind friends.

And with that Spring came the first sad break in the hospitable household. Death removed the gracious lady whose kindly consideration had made the sorely-tried mother's life again almost worth living, and Mrs. Maclarty saw her no more. The poor woman crept to the house the night before the funeral and tearfully left a pitiful gift of white flowers with a touching letter of heartfelt gratitude. Alas, when the family moved to the country earlier than usual her allowance was quite forgotten.

Time, whose soothing touch keeps us all from going mad, through grief, had lifted the shadow, when that Autumn, I arrived at the country house for a week-end visit. With the last delivery of

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letters on the Saturday night, came a letter from Mrs. Maclarty. Her little boy had died.

I have her letter before me now as I write. It is hurriedly scrawled on two blue-lined pages of a child's school exercise-book. There was no postage stamp on the envelope, and we could understand why not. It was the expression of the pent-up feelings of a heart-broken woman. Her child, his sufferings over, lay there dead in the two-roomed hovel (I saw it later) which to them had been home, and there was not a copper in the house.

Whilst her once generous friends in their sorrow had at least enjoyed the material comforts of life, and the sympathy of friends, and the recollection of long happy years with one who was no more, this poor woman had watched, alone and friendless, by the bedside of her dying boy; dying it might be for the want of the delicacies once so freely bestowed. It was an awful thought that he might have been saved. But the ministering hand had been removed, and the others had indifferently forgotten. Her stubborn pride forbade her asking help from her neighbours and she wrote that gradually all had been pawned; clothes, her wedding-ring, bed-linen, even the school-books, till at last the little corpse lay without even a winding

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sheet. "If I could only weep," the grief-stricken woman wrote, and one pictured the dry-eyed mother comforting as best she might her terrified children, whilst in the corner, on a miserable pallet lay . . .

I was immediately posted off to despatch some financial help. We passed a depressing Sunday amidst the Autumn sunshine. As early as might be, I arrived in the town by train, and before hurrying down to the address on the letter I made my way to an undertaking firm. We would see that the poor child was at least decently buried, and the mother spared the shame of knowing that he would lie in a pauper's grave. I chose a plain white coffin and told them to make all the sad but necessary arrangements. The gentleman in charge, dressed in discreet black, whose voice seemed permanently pitched in a low sympathetic key, undertook to have everything done. Then I headed for the stricken home.

In late Victorian days, when the subject was the most important thing in Graphic Art, a well-chosen title for a picture frequently meant fame and riches to the painter. Pill vendors, soap makers, whisky magnates, and all such public benefactors competed to buy the bright original with which to call attention to their useful wares.



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The three central figures of a small crowd slowly progressing towards me along the unattractive street, recalled a masterpiece wherein a gay and beautiful damsel strolled arm-in-arm between two sulking swains, all three garbed after the fashion of the time of that Hanoverian Profligate George the Fourth. It was, I remember, called "Two strings to her bow," or some such appropriate title, and at the time caused much interest. The trio advancing up the street was also creating much interest. The two wing figures, lending a friendly arm, were two large complacent policemen. Between them was the bereaved mother.

Horried as I was, a brief glance shewed that the vine leaves were in her hair. Her perennial mauve bonnet had slipped its moorings and flapped at an odd unbecoming angle. She still wore her mantle as of yore, but it was sadly disarranged where the bobbies had grabbed her arms. She still curtsied, but the old-fashioned grace was lacking—her genuflexions seemed to be involuntary. Her voice was uplifted in song, but 'twas not the haunting music of "Swanee River." In an astonishing high key, she carolled ribaldly concerning the home-coming of one Mackay. Anon she skirled as though she were the whole reel of Tulloch itself. At intervals she aimed kicks at her supporters, while playfully



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accusing both impartially of having amorous designs on her fair self.

I felt impelled to interfere. Clearly the shock had unhinged the poor creature's mind. As I hesitated, two small boys trotted past, one shouting gleefully to the other "C'way, Hughie! There's auld mither Maclarty's been lifted again." \*

That again made me pause. Could we all have made some ghastly mistake? In any case I must hold on my errand—the undertaker's men would shortly arrive and I had to be there to meet them. I continued my way down the streets to where, over an old bend or archway, I found the number of Mrs. Maclarty's domicile. At the entrance a group of women in striped petticoats, with picturesque tartan shawls over their bare heads, looked with evident satisfaction at the departing procession, and discussed the proceedings with gusto.

I felt disgusted at the turn things had taken, and felt inclined to reprove Mrs. Maclarty's neighbours for their heartlessness, with the corpse of her child only a few yards away. But I refrained and passed in under the archway. In truth I lacked

\* For the benefit of my southern readers, this colloquialism may be translated thus: "Come with me (with a view to inspection) little Hugh. Old Mrs. Maclarty has again been taken into custody by the police."

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the courage. These grim-looking ladies in the shawls did not in the least resemble the blowsy sloppy type who appears periodically in Willesden police court, proudly exhibiting a face like a Spitzbergen sunset as a token of affection from her "old dear."

I found myself in a small asphalted courtyard, surrounded by a huddle of doors and windows. In a corner a lean and scabious cat chewed without much enthusiasm at a cod's head. The stench of stale cabbage, cats and variegated offal was unbelievable. I smoked vigorously and considered the doors. Some were open, others were shut, but there was no outward sign as to who lived in them. No living creature appeared and for a moment the listless, philosophic cat and I had the place to ourselves.

Then the women in the shawls began to drift back from the street entrance, the "close-mooth" they call it thereabouts, vociferously discussing the pleasant interlude in the day's monotony. Apparently Bacchante with the two strings to her bow had passed out of sight.

I asked the nearest of the group, a sonsy wench with a baby tucked into her shawl, which might be the abode of Mrs. Maclarty. "That's it," she re-

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plied pointing, as she slacked off her shawl, then with a hoist of her shoulder swept it more closely round the infant. "But she's no there, if it's her ye're seekin'. Did ye no' meet her up the road?" I nodded my head, I felt that speech seemed inadequate. "She got a registered letter this morning. I seen the postman gie it till her. She clapped on her bunnit the meenit she got it, an' she's been playin' fair hell's delight ever since, the auld hoor! She's well oot o' the road."

"But her boy—the little boy who died?" I asked.

Gradually, for there were never less than three speaking at once; sometimes it seemed as if all were speaking together, the story of Mrs. Maclarty the arch-deceiver was disentangled. As I gathered the drift of the women's comments I swiftly designated myself as the undertaker's man. It seemed to be quite a possibility that, as the representative of a syndicate of well-meaning, if foolish philanthropists who had supported the impostor in alcoholic indulgence, while her neighbours slaved, they might have assaulted me. Their surroundings may have been unhygienic but they and their bairns looked uncommonly sturdy and healthy.

There were no young Maclartys.

"Married! *Her!*" one shouted at me amidst the

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scornful laughter of the others. “She had nae mair respect for hersel’, yon wumman, than a she-cat in a back-green!”

Her touching story was sheer fabulation. Her early life; the little children; their upgrowing; their progress at day schools and at Sunday schools; their simple joys and innocent little ways—all, all was one well-sustained myth.

Yet one must confess she was an artist. She had done it—and us—well. But, and I grew hot at the further humiliation that lay before me, I had still to interview my friend of the *voce simpatico*. Mumbling something about hurrying to catch “my mate” I left my beauty chorus.

Prepare to meet thy undertaker.

Many years ago, when the Highland Railway was first opened to traffic, and the natives had not yet grasped the rigid significance of scheduled time, a train drew up at a small station on the Highland line. It was little more than a platform and a shed. Outside, stood a hairy-heeled, dun-coloured horse yoked to what might have been a hearse. Two or three dozen men stood about in quaint-looking silk hats and black clothes showing marks of much folding. It was a depressing, drizzling day, and beyond the fields behind the

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station, the ragged edges of the mist hung low on the nearby hills.

One solitary passenger alighted and walked back to the guard's van to retrieve his luggage. There he found the station-master and two men in black arguing dejectedly with the guard. The train chugged out of the station and jerked itself into the obscurity of the mizzle. The two natives passed out through the wicket. The station-master pushed his peaked cap to one side and scratched his head, then turned to the baggage of the solitary traveller, who asked: "Is that a funeral?"

"Well," answered the station-master slowly, "you could hardly call it a funeral. You see—the corp has missed the train!"



ABSOLUTELY



## ABSOLUTELY

[With apologies to the authors of "The Meaning of Meaning"]

*Pilate saith unto him, what is truth?*

—ST. JOHN

**I**T is the frequent fate of apostles of any new doctrine, necessitating or even suggestive of work and self-sacrifice, to be received with dead cats, out-of-date eggs—and sometimes worse has happened. Not infrequently have they been "put to death," by way of encouraging others. But always, to begin with, the crowds will listen. It is only when the hat comes round, or embryo converts are invited to follow, that the mob melts away.

When that patient and persistent man Job asked of Tophar the Naamathite and his friends that they would suffer him to speak, they might mock him later, his normal penetration deserted him. That is what his good friends had come to enjoy: friends frequently are like that.

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It is only possible to succeed if you will offer the crowd something for nothing. Then they will make you a king or at least prime minister.

Unfortunately for the bearers of glad tidings there is no School for Fervents. When they receive the "call," and drop suddenly the task in hand, they emerge from the cloister, the fish-shop or, although less frequently, the stock-exchange, armed only with the shining light of the faith within them. It seems a poor sort of lever.

Usually they have ample leisure later to reflect that they may have heard the wrong noise.

So Neil Carruthers created no fresh precedent, although he is now mercifully spared the ignominy of living out the years with his failure.

A Fellow at Oxford, he was at one time moderately happy in his work, and ecstatically happy in his hobbies. Most Fellows have decided and often freakish hobbies, in which their enthusiasm gets full play. Carruthers' intellectual "side-line" was the Purity of the English Language.

He was becoming alarmed about it. He saw or felt that the English language was drifting into a condition where the meaning given to anything had no meaning. His insistence was that meaning should not be meaningless. Every day he seemed

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to find more people talking and saying nothing. From being a hobby it became his obsession. Instead of becoming a goal it was fast becoming a grievance, and he latterly suffered extremely from inability to comprehend why apparently intelligent educated people could not understand each other while the uneducated masses seemed to get on very well.

It appeared to him that ability to make oneself understood ran in inverse ratio to the degree of education.

He was a familiar figure in Oxford. That Oxford of learning, which seems unable to change. A tobacconist in the High may go out of business through the vagaries of fashion, leaving him with an unsalable stock of "Straight grains"; petrol may displace the old familiar cab, but scholastic Oxford defies time itself.

Rather tall and bony, he walked quickly in a manner suggesting that no part of his body had any connection with any other, unless accidental. His age was a conundrum, but we may set him down as being about fifty when the War began. He was one of that sort of people who always seemed to have looked the same and always would. He belonged to the no-hat brigade, and allowed his heavy



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thatch of coarse iron-grey hair to grow long. It mingled with a bunch of matted beard which began at the back of his neck and worked its way forward to his eyebrows. His moustache would have made a walrus blush.

He favoured flannel shirts of oatmeal colour, with a collar attached. Mixed up with his whiskers, ends of a tie of sorts occasionally appeared. Frequently he wore none. He affected a sartorial masterpiece known as a norfolk jacket, of grey tweed with an odour so pungent that it hummed like the whole island of Harris. His trousers of the same shaggy material were always turned up at varying lengths, exhibiting a generous amount of thick rumpled grey sock dropping over heavy greased boots, from both of which a length of leather lace always trailed.

He stooped as he hurried along, but with lifted chin, he peered out over the heads of people with two bright eyes behind thick spectacles.

Outside of his work and his grievance, his only physical hobby was walking and mountaineering. To attend to the latter he annually fared abroad in the long vac, usually to Switzerland. To keep himself fit for the Alpine performances, he made himself a nuisance locally by climbing over out-

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houses and walls. He would occasionally drop into a water-butt when endeavoring to shin up a water-pipe. But no untoward happening could ever deter him, and he was utterly incapable of realising that he could conceivably annoy anyone. He generally acted on impulse.

To the great and abiding joy of undergraduate life, the rash gentleman occasionally found himself spreadeagled on the wall of a house, so fixed that he would either have to take his toes off the top of a window and his fingers from a rone pipe and drop, or hang on in acute discomfort till someone fetched a ladder—unless something gave way: which frequently happened. As recent psycho-analytical research indicates that sufficient concentration of will power can achieve anything, such catastrophes may be set down to the presence of a mass of delighted undergraduates. From these occurrences, he came to be nicknamed the Borneo Spider, with adjectival variations.

The outbreak of the War found him in the Dolomites.

He was almost forcibly removed by some English and American tourists and brought home through Italy and France. He explained volubly that war was impossible amongst civilised peoples

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if they would only take the trouble to try to understand each other.

He desired to remain to explain this to the belligerents.

At home he endeavoured without avail to give expression to his views, then, having sufficient sense to see that the middle of a fight is not the time to stop to argue, he threw himself wholeheartedly into war work. He laboured conscientiously to the last in a munition factory, bottling his zeal for reform.

He cherished the conviction that the whole ghastly business was due to a lack of clarity in understanding. The ardour of the reformer was working within him, and he felt that he could not return to his work at Oxford until he had at least tried to put it right.

What appeared to him to be wrong was that nothing had any definite meaning. He found that verbally things were infinitely worse than before the war. Everybody still talked, made speeches or wrote and said nothing.

He looked hopefully to where the wise ones of the earth had assembled like locusts to settle in conference, all things for all men for all time.

They were at least giving themselves something

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of a chance. They were not like a struggling chemist on the verge of a discovery, lacking even the match to light his Bunsen burner. There, with their wisdom and their women, with power, time, money, secretaries, photographers and more secretaries, they sat and talked, and talked and talked.

Carruthers examined it microscopically, for he was desperately in earnest, but he could find nothing happening. Nothing at all. Everyone talked. They strung words together and invented catch phrases to be cabled home to distract the nations of the earth and divert their attention. Anon they squabbled like fishwives. Still nothing happened except more catch phrases.

Whilst waiting for something to really happen abroad, he turned his attention to affairs at home.

He found in the first place that the whole country was living in a growing spate of the word "absolutely." Young and old, rich and poor, used it to qualify everything. In fashionable ballrooms, and in unfashionable hostelries it had become universal. It had even penetrated as far north as Aiberrdeen, where, costing nothing it was most popular.

Carruthers began by writing a letter to a leading morning newspaper, drawing attention to the pain-



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ful fact, and demonstrated that unless it were the age of twenty-one in both sexes, nothing in this world could possibly be absolute. Unfortunately it was an intelligent letter and the editor published it. Carruthers straightway took rooms in Bloomsbury and considered his next move. The tow had caught fire.

Left to himself he might have been content to attack by writing. In an evil moment, someone happened to mention the House of Commons. Then Carruthers recalled that a Parliament existed, and he decided to attend. He thought it would be the very place to ventilate a grievance. He recalled Wilderbury who had been at school with him. Wilderbury had got in at the last election, and Carruthers went off to look him up in the House. He found him.

Now, to the right of the entrance, almost on the floor of the House, there exists a small pew where underlings occasionally sit and wait with papers for the guidance of certain of the nation's guardians who expect to be asked questions on subjects of which they know nothing. Into this Wilderbury, who was genuinely pleased to see his old friend, passed Carruthers, who sat amazed. The government of the country he had taken for granted. Parliamentary debate had never come within his



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purview. He listened with horror to the turgid incoherency of the lesser lights, and the fluent insincerity of the others.

Finally, he could stand no more of it. Indifferent to his surroundings, he rose to his feet—it has been explained that he was prone to act on impulse—and called upon a front bencher to make intelligible a statement he had just made. Getting no reply, and mistaking the silence which followed, he launched forth into an explanation of why he wanted an explanation. Although he kept the fact to himself, the Deputy Speaker who happened to be in the Chair, was just the least bit short-sighted, and did not at first realise this was not a Member. The majority of the Members were still too bewildered over wondering how on earth they had got there themselves to bother about other people's troubles, so Neil Carruthers who talked as he walked, at a terrific pace, had quite a minute of it before they suppressed him and led him away.

He apologised at large and went out quietly. He felt very happy, and strangely moved.

A bright newspaper man followed him home and interviewed him. He called the next morning with a copy of his paper. He had worked it up into a column, headed "Neil Desperandum."

The public appetite was a little jaded: there was

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a lull just then in the efforts of the Conference circus, and the alert scribe, Penny Macallister by name, thought he could make something of Carruthers. Macallister had not the remotest real interest in the purity of the language, nor was he troubled over the confusion of meaning. Indeed had he thought deeply about it, he would probably have decided that it all suited his tribe admirably. But he had been just long enough in Fleet Street to remember the "What is Whisky" stir, and he explained the value of publicity and the meaning of propaganda to the unsophisticated zealot. Before he left him, he had got Carruthers fairly on the rails.

It is astonishing what real enthusiasm can do when it sets to work. Under Penny Macallister's prompting Carruthers addressed a meeting in Trafalgar Square, where he launched the phrase "The Inflated Currency of Words." It was of course Macallister's coining, and that worthy worked it hard while he thought it would last. Then he sent Carruthers back to the House of Commons in an endeavour to induce his friend Wilderbury to introduce a Private Member's Bill on the subject. He did his best to give Carruthers a plausible explanation but it was quite unnecessary. The

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holy fire of the reformer was well alight, and all that Carruthers required was someone to direct him.

Carruthers saw Wilderbury, who was voluble and unpleasant. He refused to listen to Carruthers who was annoyed: he had quite a lot to say. Unfortunately Wilderbury used the word "absolutely" about half-a-dozen times in his peroration. Carruthers became furious and latterly violent when Wilderbury would not listen to him. Finally he was ejected.

The conscienceless Macallister rubbed his hands and made an indignant column out of it. Then he suggested Downing Street.

He managed to send Carruthers there with an introduction to some minor secretary. The unctuous secretary, with greater cunning than Wilderbury M. P., promised that the matter would be attended to, and presented Carruthers with a cigar. Carruthers was a non-smoker, so he waved the cigar and the promise aside. He rapidly expounded his views on the liberty of the subject—it has been explained that he was a fast speaker—and demanded an interview with someone higher up. The secretary moved towards the door, and assured Carruthers that such a thing was "absolutely im-

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possible.” There was quite a cheerful scene and Carruthers was arrested.

This was almost more than Macallister had hoped for. He accompanied the fervent to the police station and arranged his bail. He thought he might get two columns out of it. He had found “The Inflated Currency of Words” going well and his editor was delighted.

Macallister arrived in Bloomsbury with a taxi early the following morning and found, as he expected, that Carruthers had forgotten all about his appointment at the Police Court. He was a shrewd observer was Macallister.

Carruthers had never been in a police court before, and the smell in the corridors upset him. He was a healthy man with a fondness for fresh air. When his name was called, pushed on by Macallister, he found himself in what seemed to him to resemble an empty glass tank in an aquarium, with fossils, and fungoid growths on the bottom, which occasionally moved up and down like floating seaweed. It smelt of mould, cobwebs and frowsty clothes. A haze seemed to float in the dim light as if the tank had been filled with a brown vapour which was just clearing off.

He was guided into a box by a policeman. On



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his left, a benign old gentleman with silvery hair was writing scratchily with a squeaking quill. He seemed to Carruthers to be the most important person, so he at once addressed him.

“Don’t you think, sir, we might have the windows open: this stuffiness must be most unhealthy.”

The court rustled as a cornfield is moved by a passing puff of wind, while horrified voices murmured “sh-h-h.” The magistrate bent his head, and over his glasses gazed blandly at Carruthers, then resumed his scratching.

Ignoring a vermain person below, who appeared to be pressing him to accept a small book, Carruthers turned for enlightenment to the policeman beside him. He was a tall, fresh-coloured, handsome man. Carruthers had never seen a policeman without a helmet before, and it suddenly struck him that a police helmet is extremely ugly. Before he could speak, the constable directed his attention to the person with the book.

It was quickly over and Carruthers got off with an admonition. His expostulations and earnest requests for enlightenment gave Macallister nearly half a page. When he was solemnly threatened with commitment for contempt of court, he almost pathetically, but without result, asked if someone



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would explain what contempt of court meant. He quite upset the magistrate by frequently attempting to address the people in the body of the court. He had only a vague idea of what it all meant, and may have fancied that they were a jury. Several times he turned to the friendly policeman for information. He seemed to Carruthers to be the only helpful person in the tank.

"It is absolute nonsense to suggest that ignorance of the Law can be taken as an excuse," sententiously remarked the magistrate, during a pause in his scratching. Carruthers groaned.

"Then why not make the Law intelligible?" he asked, whereupon a stout man in court, who looked like a pork-butcher with a grievance, ejaculated "'ear, 'ear," and was at once hustled out.

The police court incident for the moment turned his reforming zeal to the tyranny of the Law.

Here he found a wide field. The lamentable state of the language, the apparent impossibility of expecting clarity of expression, was, he considered, due to confused thinking. It was largely, if not entirely carelessness. It might be remedied in time. In the machinations of the Law he seemed to see something sinister. It had a deliberate look.

He hastened to his impresario Macallister, but,

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for the moment, that gentleman would have none of him. Well had Penny Macallister learned that the essence of modern journalism is the constant novelty. He knew the meaning of his weekly envelope, and that was meaning enough for him. Besides, the latest Great European Conference was drawing to a close and not one of the performers had yet given cause for a real good scandal. Journalistically speaking, it was most discouraging, and Macallister was on the point of crossing over to the Continent to see if nothing could be done while yet there was time.

Carruthers had come so much to lean on Macallister, and to move at his bidding, that he felt quite lost without him. Just at that moment, an accumulation of income-tax papers was forwarded to him from his old address at Oxford. As he ploughed through them, it was borne in upon him that the whole thing had been deliberately arranged so that no one could possibly understand it. It must be put right and at once.

It was most unfortunate that Macallister was away but he remembered Prowse—old “Stoker” Prowse who had been at Corpus with him, and there had earned his nickname by his gastronomical feats. Prowse, he recalled, was now a prosperous

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solicitor in the City. He had no idea where, but he knew where the City was and someone, some policeman, would tell him.

Carruthers had come to have a childlike, although quite justifiable, faith in the London policeman. He was like the old woman who had walked in from the country to visit a son (“a well-daein’ lad, mind ye”) in Glasgow. Meeting a constable on the outskirts of the city she inquired: “Is this Glasgow?” On receiving the assurance that it was, she hopefully asked: “Is oor Donald in?”

He would start with his uniformed friends about St. Paul’s, or perhaps a little further on, and they would pass him along the one to the other, till he would be delivered at Prowse’s office somewhere, so he swung off, hatless, and still clad as in his Oxford days, indifferent to the amused stares of the people he encountered. The Londoner is reasonably indifferent to oddities, but not entirely.

After much wandering he found Prowse. Each was of course shocked at the change in the other, as men are apt to be after twenty-five years, but each was quite recognisable. Carruthers wasted no time over sentiment. He cut short Prowse’s jovial personalities and started his machine-gun hail of questions and grievances.

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He found Prowse talking an extraordinary jargon. This was the Law. He had never conceived anything so dreadful. It was worse than the speeches in the House of Commons. After nearly an hour of it—for Prowse, fat and genial, was delighted to see his old friend, although distressed at his state of mind—Neil Carruthers crept out bewildered, and wondered what Sisyphus felt.

He took to frequenting the Law Courts to glean enlightenment. His bewilderment increased. It seemed to him that at every point, every law required half a dozen weighty interpretations, rulings and what not, each producing such confusion, that the last state was merely an intensification of the first.

Then he had a practical lesson. His funds were running low, so he decided to realise his sole possession, a property in the country. A neighbour had long desired it, so it looked like a simple proceeding. He wrote to the prospective buyer, and received a lengthy, unintelligible communication from his lawyer in Exeter. He sought Prowse, and realised that no one may move hand or foot without invoking a lawyer, if only to have the other lawyer's English interpreted. The good-natured Prowse told him to leave it all to him, but no such



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thing. Carruthers had gone off the line after the legal hare, and he meant to follow it. He was asked for his titles and had that explained.

“But the property is mine,” he said. “I own it. No one questions it. It was my father’s and grandfather’s.”

Prowse tried to explain all the ramifications and the reason therefor, but Carruthers found it incredible; like the old lady who was shown a giraffe at the Zoo, and said that she simply did not believe it.

It could only be remedied by Law, and yet the Law had apparently deliberately created it all. He spent a night thinking about it, and returned next day to see Prowse. He had no appointment, but in mundane matters he had the mind of an infant. Prowse saw him, and listened with mingled amusement, and apprehension for his friend’s mind.

“My dear old fellow,” he said at last, “you’re absolutely (Carruthers winced but he was getting accustomed to it) tilting at windmills. Law exists so that we lawyers may live: that’s why there are so many of us in the House.”

That set Carruthers off at a fresh tangent. He promptly hurried as fast as his long legs—he always walked—would take him to the House of



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Commons. He desired Wilderbury, M. P. This may seem astonishing but Carruthers had the heart of a child and never imagined that he could possibly offend anybody. He was indifferent to everything but the object in view. He was disappointed at Westminster: Wilderbury, M. P., lay low and swiftly circulated a description of Carruthers amongst the custodians, with hints as to his sanity, and felt safer.

Carruthers again hunted up Penny Macallister and found him returned and glad to see him. He had developed quite a fondness for Carruthers—"Genius gone Astray" he called him—and also, he was in a better humour. At that latest Continental Conference one of the performers had been seen more than once in the company of a distinctly doubtful-looking person and Macallister hoped that something might be made of it. He was at a loss to know what to set Carruthers after. He feared that "The Inflated Currency of Words" was played out, but something might be made of the other, so he advised Carruthers to write a stinging pamphlet on "The Necessity for the Immediate Cheapening and Simplification of English Law" and have it printed in thousands, and distribute it himself outside the House of Commons, the Law Courts and

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various Police Courts. He further suggested that he should wear sandwich boards with "The Legal Trade Union" on one side, and "The Tyranny of the Law" on the other. He recommended a printer and Carruthers was delighted.

Macallister promised himself a column if Carruthers were run in. It is to be feared that Macallister is a bad man, but when he reads this he will know that evildoers cannot move unobserved.

Some weeks after, a policeman on duty near the House of Commons noticed a tall gentleman, whose silk hat, umbrella, spats and smirk labelled him "Member," stop suddenly when approaching the Members' entrance from Westminster Street, then, turning so quickly that he stumbled, he came running back to the corner round which he swung and paused to gaze back apprehensively. It looked an absurd performance. Possibly, the worldly-wise constable reflected, the gentleman had spotted something blown in from St. John's Wood, ~~that~~ he would just as soon not be seen speaking to.

It was not so. It was merely the wretched Wilderbury, M. P., who, just in time, had caught sight of Carruthers inside his sandwich boards. He made a wide detour back, by Westminster Street, round the Abbey, through Dean's Yard, and

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sneaked in by the public entrance. He was very hot and exceedingly annoyed. At his almost frantic request, a police sergeant dealt with Carruthers and persuaded him to move on. Carruthers did so cheerfully, more than ever convinced that the London Police are the most intelligent and humane of the human race.

For days he wandered about between his boards, handing out pamphlets. But his restless spirit chafed at the passive rôle. He felt he must act, and the old fervour working, he left his boards with a friendly youth at a book-stall—extreme friendliness is the outstanding characteristic of all cockneys.

Like a homing pigeon he unconsciously followed the line of his first visit to a court of law. He found himself in the same court-room and felt like Rip van Winkle. Nothing seemed changed. The same brown atmosphere, the same variety of stuffy smells. The same magistrate scratching with, doubtless, the same quill. The same malodourous people: even the same policeman. Carruthers pushed forward to the well of the court and raised his voice. He was fined two guineas and costs, which was paid by one of Prowse's clerks who had seen him enter, and had followed him. Prowse be-

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gan to have serious misgivings about his friend's mind.

Carruthers retired to his den in Bloomsbury, and returned to a consideration of the world-wide confusion being produced by the misuse of words. He found that after each conference things got worse. Each assembly apparently was called to emphasise fresh points of discord, and to arrange the date for the next: all to make the world safe for hypocrisy. By constant repetitions something came to be created out of nothing. As each fresh scheme for reparations or repayment of debts was condemned, it was promptly called something else and hailed as a success. All original debts and claims and partitions had been lost, snowed under by avalanches of meaningless words, and the wise ones of the nations gleefully called fresh conferences to invent new ones. A great physician abolished a disease by changing its name, and had more letters to follow his famous patronymic.

Carruthers considered it all, then wrote an article on "The Affliction of Unsound Dogma."

Penny Macallister published it and then started him off after a fresh hare. It was America, Macallister explained, that was at the root of it all. Alexander the Great, he told Carruthers, was the



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American spirit of that age. The cutting of the Gordian knot proved it. He admitted that Alexander was practically a professional fighter but so, he postulated, is the modern American, and although he uses the weapons of commerce, he has the same intolerance of hindrance, and refuses to be hampered by archaic phraseology. Like Alexander, he takes the quickest road. In short, Macallister concluded, your modern American spends his days cutting Gordian knots.

Carruthers could not comprehend. He recalled an American at Oxford: a Rhodes scholar. An excellent fellow, not only good at games, but most intelligent, who spoke like any ordinary educated person.

Macallister explained that he meant the American business man, and took him to the Hotel Cecil where he introduced him to many. He can do these things, can Macallister.

The Americans were delighted with Carruthers, who addressed them fluently. They pressed unholy mixed drinks on him. They slapped him boisterously on the back, and assured him that he was "absolutely the greatest thing ever." Bewildered, angry, yet fascinated, Carruthers sat listening to their crisp, direct, staccato speech, while



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like jugglers they threw about men and things, freights and exchanges, crops and shortages. But he could not repress his indignation at their treatment of the language he revered. In his usual naïve manner he made them quite a speech, abusing them roundly for their linguistic crimes, then, the cocktails working, Macallister took him away.

The Americans were enchanted and cheered him till the smoking-room rang. They implored Macallister to bring him back. They wanted to give Carruthers a dinner.

Next morning, Carruthers felt, besides other things, that he had at last found the key to the root of the trouble.

With Macallister's assistance he gathered all the best American periodicals available. He made a careful study of them and found that the writing was clear, dignified and forceful, as the occasion demanded and the form in general was most excellent. He was puzzled. Then he started to read through the advertisements and nearly committed suicide. When he was sufficiently recovered, he wrote an article which can only be described as rabid, on "The Blight of Commercialism and Its Effect on the English Language." Despite its fury and obvious bias, it was admirable and Macallister

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published it. He suggested to Carruthers that he ought to go on a lecturing tour, here and in the United States. He gave him the name of a person who arranged such matters. Carruthers wrote immediately and received a reply expressing regret but informing him that in the agent's opinion it was "absolutely impossible" to interest audiences in such a theme. Carruthers nearly wept.

Then he made the alarming discovery that his money was nearly finished.

He rushed off to Prowse who suggested journalism but Carruthers could only harp on one string and even with Macallister's help it soon died away.

Macallister at that moment had just awakened to the advertising value of porcography and was deeply engrossed in endeavouring to reach the heart of the public through a most fascinating paternity case, but he found time to suggest that the only thing left for Carruthers to do was to write a book. Carruthers jumped at the idea and hurried along the Embankment and Victoria Street towards Prowse's office to consult him as to ways and means. The good-natured Prowse at once offered him a loan but Carruthers' pride revolted. He wanted work: any quiet job that required little brain effort: anything mechanical so that he could

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have peace to think it all out—to dwell with his theme, which his nights would be devoted to writing. His needs were small and he hoped he might yet save the language of the English-speaking world.

So the excellent Prowse bestirred himself and ultimately found Carruthers an ideal billet as liftman in a spacious quiet building in Kingsway. Carruthers was enchanted. He took over his command with the enthusiasm of a child for a new toy.

He was early at the building on his first morning, and after many preliminary runs—for he was really enjoying himself—he simmered down and waited for his first client. He felt uplifted: he could feel that the day was at hand when the purity of the English language would be restored.

His first client appeared.

He was a smart Yankee drummer and he passed briskly through the entrance hall. He had a large, unlit, green cigar in a corner of his firm mouth, and a no-dam-nonsense expression on his smooth, plump, clean-shaven face. He stepped into the lift.

“Good morning,” said Carruthers pleasantly.

The drummer glanced at him suspiciously. He was not accustomed to civility from liftmen.

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“At which floor do you wish to alight?” asked Carruthers as he gently closed the gate.

“Shoot me four” said the drummer.

Carruthers gasped: then with an inarticulate animal-like cry he wrenched off the lever and sprang at the ambassador of commerce.

. . . . .

“Detained during His Majesty’s pleasure,” they called it, and the Superintendent at Crinklewood Asylum says that Neil Carruthers is one of his exemplary inmates. He spends all his time peacefully addressing space on the meaning of the word “absolutely” as applied to everything and nothing.

He has only broken out once.

The reason for his outbreak was that one day at dinner-time, he had quite inadvertently been placed opposite the service lift.





**CULOT INFERNAL**



## CULOT INFERNAL

*My boy, you may take it from me,  
That of all the afflictions accurst  
With which a man's saddled  
And hampered and addled  
A diffident nature's the worst.*

—W. S. GILBERT

WE are told that there are only two ways of making money. One of them is by sheer nine-to-six industry and the other by knowledge—the knowledge that comes through having friends who whisper to let you know when the moment is propitious to step in and, more important still, the exact moment to step out.

Having stated these profound truths, let me now present for your consideration Anton Duprez, native of Auvergne but quite a Parisian, having lived in Paris nearly all his life. He is short, stoutish and, let us call it, a little over middle age. We must not be too exigent, for he feels, the good Anton, that the years of life ahead are all too short to enjoy the good things to be found in it and tries to cheat the Three Sisters by affecting a sprightly youthfulness.

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Now Monsieur Duprez could have told you that there is still another way of making money, although what precisely it is might puzzle him to explain. Born comparatively poor, beyond a hazard he is wealthy to-day. It was not through slaving at a desk from nine till six—*sale métier d'un serf*. Nor was it from knowledge. Yet, there it is and there he is as you see him this April morning passing down from his luxurious villa in the western outskirts of Nice. In a few minutes he will reach the end of the promenade. He is on his way to offer himself his daily *apéritif* and being, as has been delicately hinted, inclined to embonpoint, he is able by much walking and seasonal visits to Vichy and Evian to limit this tendency to a pleasing plumpness. Still alert, he wears his hat with a knowing tilt and although his narrow, low-heeled yellow boots look as if made of paper and his alpaca suit would bring Savile Row out with guns, yet his diamond scarf pin, inserted sufficiently low not to be covered by his pointed beard, and the diamond shooting sparks from its bed in the plump little finger of his left hand, with which he twists his moustache so that all may benefit, would be cheap at fifteen thousand francs the pair, even if the bottom fell out of every exchange in Europe.

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With right hand in his jacket pocket holding the silver-headed cane upright at his shoulder, he does his best to square his back and turns his toes out as he hums a catchy air.

Yes, the world has gone very well with Anton since that amazing day when Fate in one crowded hour used him as a shuttle, finally slugging him hard on the *mâchoire* with a sickening right cross, and straightened him with a left swing as he fell; then, steadying him, set him in his corner and handed him the prize while still too dazed to realise his good fortune.

And who, think you, is this interesting personage? Whence his vast wealth and it is vast, *parole d'auteur*. Has he nothing beyond that to justify this appearance? *Ma foi*, yes! You, Sir, as a mere man, may not be interested—you may justifiably hate him when you know—but you, Madam, will experience a happy thrill of surprise for in him you see no other than the chief proprietor of the most famous fashion paper in the world. I return to you, Sir, in your ignorance—there is no need to explain to Madam—the magazine which revolutionised the creation of fashions and is the world's arbiter of *La Mode*.

By now he has reached his favourite *câfé* and



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while we leave him with his *apéritif* you will learn his secret.

The worship of the golden calf is the most potent mundane force to-day. It has swept the world like a plague. No other worship, no religious movement, ever matched its intensity as it sets false standards, inspiring unworthy ambitions, giving power to venal demagogues and infecting even the Chinaman,—that placid epitome of agelong contentment. In the sunny Italian *compartimenti* the carefree, happy peasant stirs uneasily as he has read to him a letter from his brother Giacomo, who emigrated to harvest on the River Plate, and who has found his way to New York, where he is now a capitalist with real money and many banana stalls.

It is not likely that Paris would have escaped the plague infection and Georges Lafont, artist, and Hector Lequellec, journalist, both still in the early twenties, had long realised that whilst the pursuit of wealth may be a sordid aim, it was a mighty pleasant one. Fine raiment with good food and wine and the cheerful *apartement meublé* which they shared in the Rue Alboni, was to them a better game than emulating Rudolph and Marcel, while their lady friends would have smiled incredulously

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and considered it pure viridian simplicity of Mimi to allow herself to die in a garret. Scorning the sloppy untidiness of Murger's characters Lequellec wasted no time writing immortal odes to his lady's eyebrows nor Lafont in going hungry in rags while he laboured at a portrait of his adored one which—when finished—would bring undying fame. Well content were they to follow Omar's advice and, taking the cash wherever they could, to allow the credit to wander whither it cared. As smart as a confiding London tailor, who travelled twice a year to Paris, could turn them out, scattered race cards of Longchamps and Auteuil meetings shewed where they sought the inspiration which they subsequently converted into coin. To spend a whole night over one bock in the Boul "Mich," even with a fair if tousled head on your shoulder, although possibly picturesque, seemed to them commonplace and lacking *chic*. Their tastes ran more to a starched skirt in the Rue Royale and romance in silk stockings.

But it is seldom that the earthen dish long survives the contact of brass vessels and the promising scheme on which they had toiled all summer hunting gold-lined financiers, instead of coming home, looked like sinking and taking them down with it.

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Their lunch was over and Georges Lafont, perched on the window-sill of the sitting-room, gazed preoccupied, through the clear, bright air across the roofs of Paris. Through the open window floated the acrid smell of petrol and the faint hum of the distant, busy streets was pierced with the shrill cries of scurrying newsvendors. He toyed idly with an orange stick, for the finger nail in mourning was no longer fashionable in an artist. At the table in the middle of the room sat Hector Lequellec. Suddenly he banged the top with his hand, rose, crossed to his friend and, placing two fifty-centime pieces on the window-sill, said, "Georges, my friend, it is not yet time for the funeral face. See then, if by night I convert these two coins, which represent every *sou* I have in the world, into the relatively small but undoubtedly necessary capital for our venture, what then will you say?"

Fast disappearing in France is the nineteenth century cheek-kissing and excitability. British phlegm with London clothes had become the correct smart pose, so Georges merely shrugged his shoulders and waited.

"My friend," continued the other, "we have been hunting the wrong ground or is it that I should say

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that we have hunted over the same ground too long? We have the energy but we lack the aim. If, by example, one shot elephants always in the same meadow, how long think you the elephants would last? It is to laugh.”

“Oh, may you and your elephants die of thirst!” said Georges wearily. “My poor Hector, it is too serious. See, I have but one piece of two francs left me. All summer have we neglected our legitimate work to try to launch this wonderful magazine which is to make revolution in the world of fashion designing and now as you know it, we find ourselves ruined. May I never sit again in La Rue’s but I have blistered my feet walking and my tongue talking and now you place elephants before me. You disgust me of you.”

“That makes nothing and it is just that, my friend,” said Hector. “Our methods have been too stereotyped, too *clichées*. We explain, we ask and we receive—nothing. They all see but they lack the courage, so we must, as your American friends say, we must ‘bounce’ someone.”

Lafont’s eyebrows nearly disappeared in his sleek black hair. “You propose . . . ?” he began slowly when Lequellec raised a hand.

“Remain tranquil, Georges, the methods of



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Claude Duval do not look at me. You jump too soon and you do not understand the American language. First, you must trust me. Next we must have old clothes: that, alas, is easy. I by example will disembarass myself of a collar—you will wear a cravat. We now become poor artisans of a respectability.” Having effected the change and handed his mystified friend one of the fifty-centime pieces, the pair sneaked past the *loge* of the *conciergerie*—to have let him see them thus attired would have damned them forever. They then took a taxi, and told the man to drive to the other side of the river. “You, my dear Georges,” continued Hector as they entered, “will now gaze fixedly on the meter until your two francs are about to expire and then we descend. Meantime I shall expound.”

Alighting in the Boulevard Montparnasse, they walked to a corner where they waited till they found a 'bus going to Les Gobelins, sufficiently crowded for their purpose. On entering the inside, they separated: Georges sitting by the door while the arch-plotter, passing up, seated himself at the farther end and, after cursing the government, entered into friendly converse with those round him. Ground bait is always useful: “preparing the street” he called it. In due course the conductor



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moved along collecting fares. He reached Hector, who ignored him. On his repeating his request for the fare, Hector began:

“*Penses-tu!* How then, what authority have you to take my money?” The conductor stared.

“Authority?” he stammered, “but I am the conductor, me.”

“Aha!” said Hector loudly, gazing round the ’bus and bringing the other passengers into it. “The conductor is he! Who knows how he has acquired this very accursed uniform and uses it to rob us—your authority if you please!” he demanded, returning to the bewildered man, while from the other end of the ’bus came Georges’ contribution.

“It is shameful: thus to exploit us honest people! But what will you, with such a government!”

The other passengers being bored with staring at each other, and fatigued with reading about the virtues of this *sirop* or that *apéritif* and at being advised not to scratch but to use Gulac; and over waiting for the rampant Lion to upset the pot of the famous blacking he has been guarding so long—while all of them who could afford it were already wearing the renowned and much-advertised *bretelles*—readily welcomed the diversion, and began to find relief in making sympathetic noises.

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Had the conductor been a man of any character probably he would have stopped the 'bus at the outset and pushed Lequellec off. Then to-day Anton Duprez would no doubt still be a minor government official or a retired rentier of modest income, instead of being able to luxuriate on the Riviera with large diamonds and to marry brilliantly his daughters. Yet, were you to tell him that at one moment his fortune depended on the lack of *savoir faire* on the part of a Parisian 'bus-conductor, he would stare incredulously. So soon and so easily do some people become accustomed to the position which riches give.

But the conductor made the fatal error of arguing and instantly the whole inside of the 'bus was in the thick of it, while Georges in the background provided the sustained accompaniment by steadily cursing the government. The value of this was quickly apparent as Lequellec foresaw. As a journalist it was his occasional *métier* to launch what his tribe call stunt phrases—the catchword that starts the modern public on the run.

The Senegal crisis was then at its height and a war, a wholly unnecessary war, was more than a faint possibility. Now the country did not desire a war—the people were content with things as they

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were. The government of the day, as is usually the fate of even the best intentioned government, had achieved great unpopularity and already more than one minister had been "demonstrated" against. This was not the old trick of French governments, wanting to avoid doing something, organising demonstrations against it, then declaring that they must bow to public opinion.

As a matter of plain truth at that precise moment, close together at one end of a large room which looked out on to the Quai d'Orsay, stood three obviously perturbed ministers. Two were average types of stout, middle-aged citizens. The third, who stood between them, was younger: tall and lean with a thick shock of long black hair, he clutched the lapels of his frock coat in his fists and frowned as he gazed at the ground. All were well-dressed, but more than one collar was limp. The strain, whatever it were, was clearly beginning to tell.

For a moment the trio stood silent, the two older men staring alternatively at each other and at their more youthful colleague. It was fairly obvious that his was the master-mind and that the other two looked to him for inspiration. Raising his head and looking to each in turn he began to speak

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in the deep voice one would have expected from him.

“My friends, it is almost too much. If those ‘demonstrations’ spread we are done. We must change our tactics. We must climb down, but to seem to do so at the bidding of a rabble . . . ,” he raised his shoulders in a prolonged shrug. “That brigand, Bécasse, is behind it all. It is not foreign politics that interests them but the chance of loot. We hear to-day that they have laid him by the heels and he is at this moment at the *Troisième Dépôt*, but what then? The scoundrel has a following and the air is electric. If we punish him we make a martyr—and then? No: we here run round in little circles talking—we must act,” and he took two long strides to a bell push. “Ask Monsieur Duprez to come,” he said to the attendant who appeared, and presently our friend entered moving quickly and bowed.

“Listen, my good Duprez,” said the tall man. “You know fully the position with this individual Bécasse. You will take twenty thousand francs and proceed at once by auto to the *Dépôt* number three. There you will see this Bécasse alone.”

Duprez started ever so slightly.

“Have no fear, we do not think him dangerous



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in that way. You will arrange matters: not only with him but his associates if there are any. Should he imagine that this will be but the beginning of a nice game of blackmail for him, good: let him think so. You see," he went on turning to his colleagues, "if we reach the end of the week, we are safe: after that we can deal with this one as we like." Turning again to Duprez, he recommenced his instructions. "You will give no explanation to anyone. I myself will prepare them by telephone from here, and there, for the moment, your word will be law."

Anton Duprez swelled as he drew a deep breath of pride.

"Twenty thousand should be sufficient for such a one but the money does not matter. Be discreet," continued the Minister, and with a wave of the hand Duprez was dismissed.

With bursting chest he sallied forth but in truth his feelings sank as he stepped into one of the cars waiting outside. Although the weather was mild he shuddered. It must be confessed that the worthy Monsieur Duprez was no Bayard. "Bé-casse, and alone," he murmured to himself. It was all very well to be told that he was not dangerous "in that way" but here was a man who had



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actually scared official Paris. He felt inclined to stop the car and bolt. "Twenty thousand francs," one could do a lot with that. . . . Zut! he was becoming timid and yet. . . . He removed his hat and wiped his forehead. A little cognac now—if only he dared stop, but through the coupé glass the forbidding-looking neck of the driver made him hesitate. Ha! He had it! This route would take him quite near his home in the Boulevard Raspail. He seized the speaking tube.

"My little cabbage," he murmured as he dashed into the house and embraced Madame Duprez. "The cognac, quick! It is an important mission I undertake, but yes! Ask me no questions but fill a small bottle with cognac. Figure to yourself the importance. Hasten!"

Realising like a good French wife that her temperate husband had some reason for his behaviour, Madame Duprez wisely wasted no time but with a steady hand filled a medicine bottle with brandy and, stoppering it with the cork which she had held in her teeth, gave it without comment to her agitated spouse. With a hand that rattled the brandy bottle on the glass he held, Duprez helped himself to a heartening dram which he tossed off at a gulp, then, kissing Madame, he rushed away.

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Thrice blessed grape! He was quite truculent when the *commissaire* received him at the Dépôt. "I see the ruffian quite alone," he pompously announced. "I require no guards. But let them be at hand, of course," he added hastily, "and—er—armed." "They always are," grunted the *commissaire* who resented political intrusions.

As he waited alone in the silence of the small, plainly furnished room Duprez looked from one door to another. In Paris all such places have two doors: sometimes three and occasionally other inconspicuous things and his spirits began to droop. Thrusting his hand into his trouser back pocket he pulled out his emergency supply and drained it. His spirits rose and—oh! blessed cordial—and inspiration came. Skimp and save as they might, the *dots* of the two somewhat homely-looking daughters Duprez mounted but slowly. Twenty thousand francs—what if they could manage . . . He hurriedly commenced to divide the money into four packages of five thousand and placed each in a separate pocket.

The door facing him opened. Propelled forward none too gently from behind the notorious one appeared and they were alone.

"See, you scoundrel," Duprez said as impres-

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sively as he could, "we, the government, have had enough of this. If for ten thousand francs you will call off your dogs and cease your demonstrations, you and your confederates, it is yours." Bécasse cleared his throat vulgarly and leered at Monsieur Duprez.

"Fifteen," said he.

"You are no fool," said Duprez trying to hide his eagerness as he pulled out the notes.

"It will do me a month," Bécasse growled, "and then you will see me again."

"*Bien*, my friend," said Duprez to himself as he touched the bell, "in another month we will have your head in the basket."

Two detectives appeared.

"You will release this man," ordered Duprez loftily, "and in a closed auto return him instantly to where you took him from. You will touch nothing in his possession!"

As he sank back in a chair, Duprez mopped the perspiration on his face. It was his first lapse, but in the thought of a contribution of five thousand francs to his daughter's *dots*, the struggle with his conscience was short and feeble. "Money does not matter," he had been told—the result only mattered. He had achieved the result. But had he?

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He pressed the bell nervously. "Have they gone?" he asked the agent who opened the door.

"They went at once, Monsieur," he was told.

Still doubts assailed him. Suppose the rascal forgot to see his confederates, or refused to share with them, or told someone. Zut! No person would take the word of such a one. Yet, the doubts persisted. "*Nom de Dieu!*" he exclaimed, rising from his chair with a jump. He had forgotten to telephone the result of his errand. Only when he had got through and announced the complete success of his mission did his apprehensions begin to subside.

He had hardly set down the telephone receiver, when a noise outside caused him to hold his breath and listen. The noise increased. He looked round but the room was only lighted by a high window giving on to a well so, fearing to go out, he could only move about and wonder. What had the scoundrel done? Assuredly it must be one of his confederates causing more trouble and he had just telephoned to report complete success. Thrice accursed grape! Had he not touched that cognac . . . and he clenched his pudgy fists and shook them beside his ears as he agitatedly paced up and down. He pulled out the medicine bottle and after



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a glance to see if it were quite empty, made as if to throw it into the stove, but, recollecting in time that he was in the midst of police and detectives he replaced it in his pocket. Then he felt for the remaining packet of five thousand francs. Should he burn them?—the stove was empty but a match now—yet these sons of devils, the detectives—suppose there were a secret spy hole?

He glanced round furtively and, collapsing in his chair, he groaned.

Banging doors and voices—many voices—in the room of the *commissaire* behind him made him turn. Cautiously he moved to the door, opened it a fraction of an inch, and listened in a moist anxiety.

When we left him, Hector had risen to his feet in the 'bus, holding his fifty-centime piece for all to see.

“Look you then!” he shouted. “I am poor but I am honest, me. I hold my money, but I shall know where it goes,” and several passengers also rose to express their views.

“It marches well,” thought Georges and launched a louder and more comprehensive curse at the government. Then the driver, hearing and then seeing the tumult inside, stopped the 'bus and



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came round to assist his colleague whose ineptitude was producing such confusion.

“See then,” cried the alert Hector pointing, “he calls his confederate to support him. Two to rob one poor young man—but, what assassins!”

The Place d’Italie is at all times a crowded centre and with the outside passengers climbing down to investigate the noise and the cause of the stoppage, and to add their voices to the argument, the excitement quickly spread to the street.

“Let us descend, my friends,” said Hector loudly. “Let us have justice!” and with difficulty he and the dumbfounded conductor pushed through the people inside of the ’bus, Georges closing in with them as they passed. On the platform outside Hector stopped and harangued the crowded street. “Look, then, my friends, I am an honest fellow. I travel and I pay. I hold my money,” and once more the fifty-centime piece was held aloft. “See, he displays his money,” cried voices from the now interested and ever-gathering crowd. “And now comes this species of robber dressed, doubtless, in a stolen uniform and with no authority would take my money! Are we then serfs?” he shouted.

“What will you with such a dirty government?”

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cried Georges, and in an instant the street rang with cries against the government.

Two *agents* were seen making their way through the crowd in the wake of the 'bus driver. "See there!" declaimed Hector, dramatically throwing out his empty hand. "His confederate brings more of the brigands in stolen uniforms. Four to make war on one innocent citizen."

At the word "war" the crowd burst into an angry roar, and surged threateningly round the mystified policeman who with difficulty reached the 'bus steps.

An abiding faith in, and respect for, the majesty of the law and its minions can hardly be laid at the door of the Parisian public. Witness the widely appreciated efforts of all motor-car drivers to run down at least one policeman daily, and as history amply testifies, the populace there is the most combustible human material in the world. Almost pleadingly the older of the two *agents* asked Hector to pay his fare and go away, or he would have to come to the *Depot*. The journalist was relentless, yet with due caution. The plot had gone well but remembering his countryman's dictum that the greatest enemy of the good is the better, he decided that the time had come to stage the next scene. Holding up both hands he shouted, "I yield me to

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force, my friends. I go but these sacred robbers must leave their stolen 'bus and accompany us. You will see justice done, my friends! But I am honest, me!" and stepping down he placed himself between the two *agents* who with shouts of, "*Circulez donc, circulez! Move on there!*" pressed forward, the 'bus conductor and driver following.

Without in the least knowing what it all was about, but hearing the wildest rumours and taking its cue from the indefatigable Georges, who brought up the rear of the group voicing imprecations against the government, the crowd began to utter menacing threats.

As they surged down the street leading to the *Dépôt* several of the police in pairs ran out and, meeting the crowd, endeavoured to stem it. As well might they have whistled to Niagara to stop. Quickly they followed their well-known manœuvre. Flattening themselves against the wall they allowed part of the crowd to pass, then, pressing across the street in line, they faced round and struggled to split the crowd in two and to drive the leading portion down the street. Too late. A few moments sooner they might have succeeded, but not now, and as blows began to be exchanged, the sergeant in charge of the squad collected his men



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and they fought their way to the entrance of the *Dépôt*.

Inside, between the two dishevelled *agents*, with the sheepish conductor and scowling driver, Hector Lequellec was orating—and indeed he has a fluent tongue—to the *commissaire*. “Look you, then!” he said indignantly, “why am I here? Demonstrate to me your authority! Of what is this building and who are you? I am an honest traveller, me. I travel and I pay my fare—see then!” and with an air, he deposited his trump card, his little coin, on the table before the astounded official, who rubbed the top of his bald head and stared.

“Who then are these men?” demanded Lequellec as with a theatrical gesture he indicated the conductor and driver then folded his arms. Both the ’bus company’s employees commenced to speak volubly and loudly: they appeared to be overflowing with emotion and to have much to say. The *commissaire* half closed his eyes and averted his head while he wagged the palms of his hands at them. The *agents* each held up a warning finger and the pair stuttered into silence.

“You there,” began the *commissaire*, an inadequate, melancholy-looking man, the monotony of his sallow visage broken only by a long, drooping

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moustache, "what . . ." when the main door to the street opened letting in a roar from outside and the sergeant. "*Monsieur le commissaire*," he blurted out as he gathered up his torn cape. "It is too much, this. The streets are blocked in every direction. There is nothing to be done," and he turned examining ruefully his cape.

Without pausing to reflect, the *commissaire* stepped to a window and looked over the obscured lower half. He was greeted with yells from the mob outside. "Down with the robbers!" they shouted, knowing nothing of the cause of the trouble. "Down with the government! *Mort aux vaches!*"

"Quick—we must get more men. Telephone to . . . no, no, wait!" said the *commissaire* as the door opened behind him and our agitated Monsieur Duprez appeared, livid with rage and fear.

"Dolt! Imbecile!" he hissed. "Would you then bring on us a new Affaire Dreyfus, sacred name of a sacred name! Bring that young man in here—hold the others—let no one go out," and he whisked back to the other side of the door, through which Lequellec was immediately bundled by the *agents*, awakened to swift action by this unexpected development.



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"Leave us," snapped Duprez to the *agents* as they pushed after him into the room. "Get out! Go!" he shouted, and moved his arms as if he were swimming breast stroke. Then he turned to Hector. "Silence, rascal!" he snarled shaking his fist at him as the other attempted to orate. "A word from me and you will see Devil's Island to-morrow!"

"*Ma foi*," said the irrepressible Lequellec to himself, "he clearly intends to send me by aero."

"See then," said Duprez, "this must be stopped. Is it money? Speak sense, fool."

Hector Lequellec's heart jumped till it momentarily choked him. "What luck! Success: success," he murmured, then pulling himself together he replied, "It is, Monsieur. You see before you," and he struck his chest, "one who will make your fortune with his own, had he but a miserable ten thousand francs. For that sum, Monsieur, your future and mine will be assured."

"May your future be in prison," said Duprez savagely, thinking of the vanishing *dots*. "One thousand francs will you receive to stop that rabble. Not another *sou*."

"Pooh!" said Hector making a circle with his hand, "that would not let us make a start."

## CULOT INFERNAL

Duprez stared. "Yes: this must be one of Bécasse's accomplices proposing some sort of nefarious partnership of blackmail. . . . The telephone cut into his thoughts. It was his chief! "Yes, yes, I come at once . . . some matters to adjust . . . I come now!" he bleated humbly and the receiver dropped. Utterly unable to comprehend what Lequellec was driving at, he turned towards him. That person, alert although equally bewildered, seeing money in the offing, wondered what his next move should be. He could hardly credit his good fortune but fearing to make a false move, kept silent.

"*Mais vous avez le culot infernal,*" said Duprez viciously, as he turned from the telephone, realising that his innocent daughters must suffer but in the hopes of retrieving a corner. "See then!" he said resignedly, "if for four thousand francs you will cause to disperse this crowd—it is yours."

"Never!" replied Hector. "It would not pay our printers. Rather than take less I will go to this Devil's Island you promise me," and he folded his arms with a well-assumed air of pride while the hubbub outside increased.

"Printers?" repeated the distracted Duprez. "May *le bon Dieu* help me to understand. Rogue

## CULOT INFERNAL

or lunatic you may be but here are the five thousand." Groaning inwardly, he handed over the wad of notes adding, "and may you . . ."

"Stop, Monsieur!" cried Hector. "I will not receive this money under any misapprehension," he said, carefully stowing away the notes. "I am neither thief nor blackmailer. Gratitude exists although the uneducated may desire to disbelieve it," he continued raising his voice as the trembling Duprez took him by an arm and began to push him towards the door. They waltzed across the room. Their hands met at the handle, Duprez striving to open it as Hector checked the turn. "With this sum, small though it is," he panted while they struggled, "you became joint proprietor of a fashion journal which will revolutionise all such and bring you a fortune beyond your dreams." He positively shouted the last word to the bewildered occupants of the outer room, as the door was finally torn open and he was thrust through by the frantic Duprez, who fervently consigned him to all known and several unknown devils.

But it was even so and if you are sceptical let us follow the good Anton Duprez as he makes one of his monthly trips to Paris. Ah no! Not that: no tales out of school. But watch him as he de-

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scends with dignity from the luxurious *wagon lit* of the P. L. M. and enters a taxi. Straight to the Rue Taitbout he is driven and stops at the palatial office of the world's most famous fashion paper. Up he goes in the lift and presently enters a nobly-furnished room, and Hector Lequellec it is who comes forward to meet him. The same irresponsible Hector, although the war has flecked his once jet-black hair with white and lined his merry face. More slowly because of the leg he left at Verdun, Georges Lafont rises.

"My priceless buffoons," is the invariable greeting of Anton Duprez as he goes to them with outstretched hands.

"*Bon jour, cher oncle de l'argent,*" they always reply.





## THE RING



## THE RING

*Join bravely, let us to 't pell mell.*

—KING RICHARD III

**T**HAT the closed hand was man's earliest and most natural weapon there can be little doubt. Even amongst the "divers laws" of that second book of Moses called Exodus, such as "strove together smiting with the fist" were legislated for—which may perhaps account for the number of the Chosen Race spread amongst the Fancy to-day.

With the growing popularity of boxing as a spectacle—whether it has gained as a sport, others can decide—the enterprising impresario has seen to it that matches may now be witnessed by anyone with comfort and safety, both as to one's person and one's valuables. Indeed, so much a business has it become, so much do safety and comfort count, that to-day the game itself is frequently not worth watching. It has, however, a useful side, as it enables publicity agents to announce to a duly impressed public, the presence—with cigar—at

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the ringside of self-important vanity-stricken gasbags.

Gone are the days when a mill or a scrap—it is always a “contest” now—could only be witnessed by the initiated. Such initiation necessitating, in its earlier stages, the acquaintance with many unsavoury, if interesting characters. Yet even to-day muddle-headed grandmotherly legislation, impelled by sentimentalism instead of logic, often makes it easier and safer to preach treason in the marketplace than to assemble to witness two men boxing. At every turn the natural outlets for the high spirits of youth and a healthy man’s superfluous energy are blocked by the suppression which serves the turn of emasculated cranks. Human nature remains unchanged and unchanging through the ages: circumstances alone can alter, and the philosophic Persian enunciated a great truth when he wrote that the memory of indiscretions is the sunshine of old age. Better far, as the Lowland Scots say, to let the tail gang wi’ the hide, when ginger can still be hot i’ the mouth, than to present the sordid spectacle of grey hairs jealously awakening too late to the possibilities of life, and vainly and pitifully endeavouring to recover a lost youth.

The introduction of gloves, with the use of which

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the law now tolerates public boxing contests, however satisfactory to the reformer, in no way minimises any imaginary brutality. Indeed if brutality there be, it can only increase it, as protected hands last longer. In old P. R. days when the rules allowed wrestling as well as boxing, the performers had to toughen their hands by pickling, so that they might not become useless after a few rounds. In fights—or contests if you prefer the “genteel” word—which lasted a long time, the pugilist’s hands were usually so battered and puffed as to make it a painful business to hit at all, and the affair generally dragged out in a sequence of striving for a cross-buttock until one or other, sickened with repeated falls, failed to toe the line.

To-day, even as cock-fighting, driven underground by the kill-joys, flourishes in corners up and down the country, an old-fashioned bare-knuckle fight may at times be witnessed along Clydeside.

Timorous old ladies in Westminster appear to conceive the banks of the Clyde to be populated by contumacious hordes of raging red communists—whatever they fancy that may mean.

In reality, in so far as the native population goes, it is inhabited by hard-headed people given to reasoning out things for themselves, who will



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not, without examining both sides of it, meekly accept whatever happens to be handed out to them by the Elected Ones. Who has not heard of the Kilbarchan weaver's prayer: "Lord gie me a guid conceit o' mysel' "? The motto of the principal city is a devout and seemly prayer that it—that is the inhabitants—may flourish. This, its citizens do exceedingly well, by taking it away from other less sophisticated peoples. Now as communism would seem to mean that all things are to be held in common, adhering to such principles necessarily implies the abandonment of the system under which they flourish. Which, as our old friend Euclid would say, is absurd.

Leaving behind us the wet tramlines glistening in the dark under the brilliant electric lamps—you know that it always rains there—we turned up, or it may have been down a broad quiet gas-lit road. As we took the corner, a police inspector and constable standing together, looked hard at us. We gave them a civil good-evening. It is well to be polite to authority, especially when there is a distinct possibility that you may soon meet again under different circumstances. One felt that they had turned to watch our movements.

Along our right hand as far as could be seen, ran

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a high stone wall behind which rose stacks of timber. On the left, a block of tenements and a few small older houses, then a wall in which stood a large pair of wooden gates.

We knocked at the wicket, which opened so quickly that the alert custodian must have marked our footsteps stop. Recognised, we passed in. At the end of the road the two policemen were staring hard after us.

We found ourselves in an enclosed space, dimly lit at the far end by a flickering oil lamp. Over slippery cobblestones we stumbled in the dark, through a long narrow yard smelling of wet tarpaulin. Tripping over cart-shafts and picking our way through a raffle of junk, we reached a door below the lamp, and again knocked. A square peephole opened so quietly, that the strong shaft of light flooding through, struck one like a blow. A face appeared, the features indistinguishable with the strong light behind. Apparently the scrutiny was satisfactory, for we were passed in without anything being said. It is remarkable that at neither door was a word spoken.

We found ourselves in a low-roofed stone-built building some sixty feet square, redolent of bad gas, resin and stale sweat. It looked like an out-

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house of some once-flourishing farm, which the stretching tentacles of the ever-spreading city had reached across. Round the walls, and from the roof, the place was lavishly lit with gas, which, through incandescent burners, threw a ghastly green tint on the thinly whitewashed walls which dripped moisture. In the centre stood the ring with three tiers of ropes. The corner-posts with thickly padded tops, were braced to the floor with ropes led to ringbolts. Round the ring itself were three or four rows of backless wooden benches. Behind these the wooden floor was quite bare.

About a score of persons in greatly varying walks of life were seated in irksome expectant silence round the ring, in which a youth in a grey sweater was moving about, sprinkling powdered resin on the boards, stopping now and again to place his heel on a large lump and grind it down. In each of the two opposite corners of the building farthest away from the door, several other youths in sweaters fussed round their man, already stripped, putting the finishing touches to his toilet. Everyone spoke in low tones.

Between them, about a dozen others stood wrangling fiercely. Half of them were obviously Tyne-side Geordies and the others as obviously belonged

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to the district. The two parties were huddled together behind their apparent leaders who, glaring at each other like terriers in leash, led the arguments.

Although we are told that England does not properly begin till south of Trent, the two types were as distinct as East and West. The sharp staccato cadence and nipped vowel of Glasgow jarred against the broad, soft Northumberland burr. The Geordies were all fairer of hair and skin; more freshly coloured; thicker set and more "beefy" than the Scotsmen, who ran more to leg and bone. It seemed to an onlooker that the strangers were more placid; more reasonable, not to say soft, while the local men were sullen and irascible, and left the impression that they would just as soon fight as argue.

Then the group turned their heads in our direction, and the two leaders, leaving the others snarling, passed round the corner of the ring, and came across to where we stood. The visitor left the talking to the other, who swiftly explained. It was a "needle" fight. Parenthetically, and for the benefit of the uninitiated—for who so rash as to teach the sucking of eggs—a "needle" fight is one where sometimes there is as much personal ill-feeling



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between the principals as might account for murder. As a general rule however, and in the present instance, it had all arisen over an acute difference of opinion as to respective merit.

The antagonists were Wattie Noble of Jarrow, and Chookie Rattray of Renfrew. The conditions were simple; catch-weights with bare knuckles over ten two-minute rounds. Each had his own money down, which is not unusually a guarantee of good faith and earnestness, and the affair was to be brought off quietly before the more orthodox "club" show at eight o'clock. It was then after seven, and it all looked like ending in a free fight, or at the best in a fiasco.

The explanation of the trouble was that the visiting gentlemen had brought their own stakeholder and referee. And we had thought that they looked soft. Canny Newcastle! The locals, blandly ignoring the fact that they had produced *their* own stakeholder and referee, were expressing righteous indignation over the others' lack of faith. We seemed to offer a way out of the deadlock: would one of us act as referee and the other as stakeholder?

I firmly refused both honours and also the office of timekeeper: I desired to look on, not to cock an



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apprehensive eye at a watch dial. My friend, who knows the game in theory and practice quite as well as is necessary for the job, and who besides, is blessed with a sufficiency of bulk to be impressive, finally consented to referee. A respectable, but very reluctant "gent" at the ringside had the stake-money, in the shape of two wads of greasy banknotes, thrust on him to hold, but he vigorously protested at being made to hold any bets. It was instructive to observe that, after careful counting, he thrust the notes into an inside pocket, and, although the place was becoming unpleasantly warm, buttoning jacket and overcoat, he sat with tightly folded arms through it all.

A word to the doorkeeper and he disappeared into the yard, the door being locked and barred behind him.

The two men, with overcoats slung on their naked shoulders, ducked through the ropes and sat on wooden chairs in their respective corners. Two seconds followed each into the ring, whilst outside, a third fiddled with towels and sponges and a tin basin half-filled with water. The spectators, of whom there were not quite half a hundred, took their seats around the ropes, the visitors bunching to one side of the ring and the locals to the other.

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Along a third side was a narrow unvarnished deal table, at which the referee and timekeeper took their seats, while I, in virtue of my friend's status, was invited to occupy a third chair beside them. With a solemnity which would have been creditable in a bishop, the timekeeper rose, and, speaking softly, as though a whole squad of police were listening outside, introduced the two aspirants.

"Why, 'Chookie'?" I asked him, as the referee stood up to call the two opponents to him for final warnings.

"Weel, ye see, his feyther used tae deal in poultry, so the folks ca'ed him the chookie—choker—thrawin' chickens' necks, d'ye see? And this yin was aye ca'ed Wee Chookie. He's a game yin—d'ye want a bet?" But I declined.

The pair had slipped off their coats, and stood in front of us while the referee addressed them. Noble, I was informed, was the heavier, and had weighed just ten stone and ten pounds. About five foot nine, he was a good inch shorter than his opponent. He appeared to be about twenty-one years old, and, from his long fair hair to his feet, his sturdy figure made a picture of athletic manhood. As he moved, his muscles rippled under a smooth pink skin as innocent of hair as a child's. Al-

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though he had a deceptive look of plumpness, a discerning eye could see that he was trained to the minute, and his waist was as trig as a girl's above his black worsted shorts, which, with shoes, was all that either wore.

With arms akimbo, he stood leaning slightly back on his right foot, smiling with frank grey eyes at the referee as he waited to hear his instructions. These were the care-free days before Armageddon, and, looking back, one realises that there was the true infantry type that did so much, and cheerfully underwent so much, to win the war.

His taller opponent stood grimly leaning forward, gripping the rope with his left hand. Being darker he looked older; perhaps twenty-four. Although nearly half a stone lighter, his shoulders were broader and his hairy forearms heavier. Leaner in the hip and leg, his iron-hard muscles shewed as if outlined with blue chalk. His dark hair, worn long like Noble's, grew low on a broad intelligent forehead. But there was no smile nor mirth in the eyes that gazed unwinking at the referee.

It is passing strange, when one reflects on the part that eyesight plays in boxing, that the fashion of long hair set by Choynski and Corbett has uni-

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versally prevailed in the ring. It is really astounding to see men, to whom one quick blow may mean fame and fortune or disaster, lifting their hands to push hair out of their eyes.

"Shake hands," ordered the referee, "and don't forget that each round starts when 'time' is called."

Gay and debonair, the pride of Jarrow quickly put out his hand with a smile. No less quickly it was taken but not a muscle moved in his opponent's face.

"Now, I'm not coming into the ring," the referee went on. "If you get into a clinch, you can hit yourselves free. If either of you fouls, he'll be warned *once*: no more. Understand?"

"Yes," smiled the Englishman. The other merely nodded his head.

"Off you go then," and each returned to his corner.

"Seconds out," breathed the timekeeper without looking up from his watch, and the men stood up in the angles of the corners, each hand lightly holding the top rope.

"Time!" and they were circling round each other in the centre of the square; savage determined terrier and a good natured tenacious bulldog. One can guess which would hearken first to the craven



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squeal of "kamerad" and realize why Divisional Generals in the years that followed, squabbled and intrigued to collect the tartan.

Suddenly Noble dashed at his man as though he would flog him off the face of the earth before he could realize what had happened. With a sliding motion Rattray imperceptibly slipped back, and almost in the same movement swung forward and lashed out a wicked straight left, flush on Noble's face, which checked the rush, and before Noble could clinch or get out of distance, he had caught two vicious hooks from Rattray's right.

Round after round it continued: Noble rushing and Rattray meeting him, always with that piston-like left arm popping out, timed to an instant. Pass it, Noble could not. Nothing daunted, he came up smiling again and again, and, ever on his toes, dashed like a pink rubber ball at the stone-like figure before him. The struggle was as free from any attempt at unfair work as a Sunday-school treat.

Round the ring, complete tense silence prevailed, the only sounds being the tap, tap of Noble's feet as he sprang lightly in and out: the smack, smack as counter followed lead, or the crunch along the resined boards as Rattray's stealthy glide took him



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out of danger or into hitting distance. So far he was ahead in points. Try as he would Noble could not reach that dark rugged head.

Then Noble changed his tactics. For several intervals, his seconds had been vigorously hissing advice at him, while they fanned, and sponged, and rubbed. Fresh and gay as ever his training left him with little sign of the hammering he had taken, and thrown off with no more effort than a retriever shaking himself after a swim. He still rushed—but now at Rattray's body. Heedless of the punch he sometimes had to take to get there, he would not be denied, and bored in with both hands busy. Defense he ignored. To win, he must concentrate on attack, and when Rattray came up to the call of "time" after that round, his lean flanks shewed many dull red splotches.

Staying power is wind. Knock the wind out of a man or a horse and he is helpless. Nothing pulls a fighter down so quickly to a point where he is easily knocked out, as constant hammering on the body. Well, Rattray knew it, but he had not that broad forehead and those wide-set eyes for nothing. His unflurried brain was working it all out. There was no whispering advice nor exhortations from the seconds in his corner. He knew the

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game as well as any, so they wisely left him alone. "Time" was again called.

Rattray had barely risen from his chair; he was still in his corner, when, like an infuriated ram, Noble hurled himself across the ring to finish it. Elated at his turn of success, his seconds had chattered at him so much during the interval that he must have slightly lost his judgment.

But Rattray was not there. Just in the nick of time with his stealthy glide he side-stepped his opponent's rush, and, turning as he moved, still unbalanced, Rattray took one of the biggest risks a boxer can take—he led with his right. Once, twice, thrice, like lightning he swung, shifting his ground with each blow till he had fairly penned the other against the ropes in the corner. Relentlessly he rained his half-arm punches. Noble bent his body into an arch. Down went the yellow head till his chin nestled on the broad chest: up came the massive deltoids till they seemed to touch his ears; close to his ribs he hugged his elbows, while his hands protected the sides of his head. He was like a tortoise which had tucked its head into its shell. Watching Rattray's feet he saw him shift— instantly with an upward shove he pressed out, and, resting his head on Rattray's chest, he thrust

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forward, banging his opponent's ribs till they closed in the first clinch since it began.

The referee rose but there was no need. He had hardly opened his mouth when they sprang apart. Then, from being attacked, Rattray became the aggressor. As a cobra strikes, his long whipcord arms flashed out, and slip, duck, counter as he would Noble steadily lost points.

"Time" was called for the last round.

Noble rushed no more. He knew he was behind on points: he knew his only chance of winning was by a knock-out. Undaunted, and brisk as ever, he danced in and out, feinting, dodging, trying to make or see an opening which would enable him to bring off a desperate chance and lay out this dangerous saturnine figure. But Rattray was in no hurry. He felt that he must win on points, and would take no risk of leaving himself open. He slid about, ever holding that menacing left hand forward. Of course, if he got an opening himself, he would take it. Perhaps he thought he was not so much ahead on points, and had better end it if he could.

Both did the same thing simultaneously.

A feint with the left hand: the right swung across to the unguarded chin and the pair were lying oblivious on the floor.

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Without volition I had jumped to my feet. I glanced round the ring; everyone was on his feet except the case-hardened timekeeper, who monotonously chanted out the passing of the seconds.

"One, . . . two, . . . three . . ." The referee climbed into the ring. "Four . . . five . . . six . . . seven . . ." Would either rise? Noble rolled his head and feebly tried to turn on his side. Rattray never stirred. "Eight . . . nine . . . out!"

Yes "out" but who?

What of the bets? Suppose one had been backed to beat the other—he had failed. What then? I looked anxiously at my friend. The seconds had jumped in and dragged their men to the corners, where they were busy over them with sponge and flask. One of Rattray's seconds was twisting his ears.

Every pair of eyes was on the referee. He told me afterwards that he knew in that moment exactly how Daniel felt in his den of lions. It did not require an over-vivid imagination to realise what might happen if he gave a wrong decision. To gain a moment he returned to the ropes, ducked under and slowly resumed his seat.

"Sit down, everybody," said the timekeeper.

Slowly the ringsiders subsided. As they sat



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down a subdued but excited murmur broke out among them. I looked at the reluctant stakeholder. He had not risen, but sat, a picture of apprehension, with arms still tightly folded. Then my friend rose and announced: "Neither contestant answered the call of "Time!" The decision is 'no contest.' Stakes returned and all bets off."

I breathed freely once more. He must have been inspired.

As the two late contestants were being assisted to their respective impromptu dressing rooms in the corners of the building, the door was thrown open and the "members" swarmed in.

Nearly all wore soft caps with large peaks and the grey collared sweater seemed universal. As many of them must have been standing in the yard for some time in a drizzling rain, they brought with them that heavy indescribable odour of damp and not over-clean humankind, to mingle in the blend of gas, sweat and rank tobacco, which, with the nauseating smell of almond hair-dressing, soon pervaded the place. Here and there was noticeable the bowler hat and clean linen of some bourgeois sportsman. These latter were ushered, or, to be more exact, they were shoved through the crowd to the deal benches. On these, with much



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objurgation from those already seated, they were wedged, for which doubtful privilege they each had parted with one sovereign. Those in the front row had their noses literally on the ropes, with the knees of the second row "gents" jammed into their backs. They none of them looked too happy, and now and again one would furtively slip a hand inside his overcoat, as if to reassure himself that his watch and pocketbook—if he had been so foolish as to carry such things—were still with him, and had not been removed by some person to whom he had not even been introduced. We were pressed to remain at the table, but modestly retired and took up a strategic position near the door. We were both sufficiently tall to see over the heads in front.

The place was soon packed to suffocation. Immediately in front of us wheezed an overdressed fat fellow slightly known to both. Sadly handicapped by nature, and in consequence unable to shine in performance himself, his life's desire was to be labelled as a Corinthian, and to be recognised as a patron of sport. His effort that night had cost him a wasted sovereign. Arriving late, his endeavour to push through and claim his seat had been discouraged by the pointed threats of those

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intervening. His bleating request to be allowed to pass through was stifled by a coarse injunction to "shut his —— mouth" the speaker describing that organ by an adjective which strictly speaking even perversion could not apply to it.

Presumably as an appetiser, a short contest between two enthusiastic, if not over-scientific youths was staged. Bang, biff, bang, went the gloves, as they slogged at it hammer and tongs, making up in zeal what they lacked in skill. Happily there were only four rounds.

Then followed what looked like being a most interesting bout between two light-weights, one a negro. Unfortunately, it came to an untimely end through the head of the son of Ham coming into violent contact with one of the corner posts. Slipping on some spilled water just as he received a flush hit on the point, he collapsed. They dragged him away, and the legend of the invulnerability of the negro head took the list. Various disappointed backers of the coon made loud and violent suggestions as to what should be done with him.

Then the solemn timekeeper announced the last turn, the tit-bit of the evening, other than the private seance at which we had assisted. It was between two middle-weights, Paddy Kelly and Inky

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Harris, the latter so called, we were informed by a friendly bystander, for the reason that when unpleasant circumstances compelled him to stoop to regular work, he did so in a printing establishment.

But however nimble Mr. Harris may have been in slinging ink, or whatever it is that printers amuse themselves with, he seemed signally unable to leave his mark on his opponent. Kelly, although his punches lacked steam, was a rapid hitter. Like a hackney he was all action and no pace. He drove his man all over the ring and appeared to hit him whenever he liked.

Several monotonous rounds of this dragged on and, as it was announced for twenty, we were just about to leave, when a small person, undistinguished in any way except that he had Yiddisher written all over him, squeezed slowly across our front. As he passed the obese would-be Corinthian, he apologised for jostling him, then turning away and speaking apparently into vacancy, he said, not loudly, but quite clearly: "Harris wins for a hundred—who wants it?" At the same time he held up, that all who cared might see, a veritable one-hundred-pound note. Without deigning to glance back he slowly edged away, moving a few

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inches at a step, while he repeated his offer and continued to flourish the banknote. "Harris wins for a hundred."

Our fat friend began to shew signs of excitement.

Although he had inherited so much money that an ordinary person would have been ashamed to possess it, the thought that he might miss winning a hundred pounds so easily, was making him quite unhappy. "It's money for nothing," he spluttered over his shoulder to us. "Look! Harris simply couldn't win, could he?"

We were looking, and certainly it seemed as if the Inky one were not having too good a time. At the slow pace he was travelling he might reach his destination very soon: which is not such a contradictory statement as it seems. Still, it was none of our business. Indeed if the truth be told, base knaves that we are, we rather hoped that the novitiate would flop into it.

"Here! Hey!" he called to the holder of the hundred, and as calmly as if he had expected it, the Jew turned and pushed through to him.

"I'll take you," said Fatty.

"Right," said the Yid, "here's my money—yours?"



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"But I don't carry hundred pound notes with me," bleated the stout sportsman, cocking an anxious eye at the ring where Kelly was still energetically handing it out to Harris.

"But you have your cheque-book surely; *your* cheque is quite good enough for me, sir."

Fatty lugged out his cheque-book and a fountain pen.

"Make it to bearer," added the Child of Ghetto, mysteriously producing a piece of wood which he held up as a desk for the writing. Such attention to detail compelled respect.

With a final glance at the ring Fatty wrote.

An accommodating person was found to hold the stakes: we again declined, having no desire to be in any way involved in the education of a mug.

The sequel soon developed.

How the signal was sent we never fathomed, for the hundred-pound merchant remained with us, and, although we kept as sharp a look-out as ever did Sister Anne, neither he nor anyone else seemed to move.

In the very next round, Mr. Harris came out of his trance and from being receiver-general he began to sadly discomfort Paddy by sending over a positive hail of blows, finally landing him a heart-



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ening thump below his left ear with a swinging right. Mr. Kelly subsided gently to the floor and remained there. It was quite an artistic bit of business.

As we moved out into the relief of the wholesome wet night, and picked our way over the cobblestones in the yard, Fatty breathed dire vengeance.

"The whole thing was a plant," he burred, "I'm going to tell the police."

We told him he would probably find some outside and left him.

Whether he were following their advice or acting on his own initiative is immaterial, but early next morning outside a branch of a well-known bank, an enormous cream-coloured limousine slid ponderously to a standstill. The design must have broken the coachbuilder's heart. It only required a cloud of steam and a smell of fish to complete the illusion. A door, adorned with a crest, or it might have been a coat of arms, like a Swiss hotel label, opened, and Fatty flounced out.

He banged into the bank where he was received by the manager who greeted him warmly. It is pleasant to be able to record this, as, to many, a banker is a professional pessimist who sits in a

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usually gloomy room and says "no." But it may make a difference to own an odd million or two and a motor car like a perambulating potato stall.

Together the banker and his client advanced to the counter.

"I am very sorry," said the teller, "it was cashed almost the instant we had opened our doors, only a few minutes ago."



## THE REAL THING





## THE REAL THING

*In a vale in the land of Moab, there stands a lonely grave.*

—C. F. ALEXANDER.

THE regiment halted. To the practiced eye this unit was what a civilian might have called self-supporting. The bulging haversacks of the men, the feeds on the saddles, the extra blanket, all told their tale. It was clear that if the body of the enemy located that morning by native scouts on their swift Bisharin camels had again felt the draught and flitted, these horsemen were prepared to push on and find him—if not that day, then the next, sleeping and watering where they could. Two grim-looking motor-driven ambulance cars at the tail of the column were gruesome evidence of the hope and determination to fight.

On every hand, save for a solitary quivering mirage, the apparently unbroken sweep of the desert stretched to the shimmering horizon in a monotony of sandy grey. The awful sense of isolation, the utter hostility of nature, seemed to have silenced the most irrepressible chatter-box, and the

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hum of voices that usually follows a halt was strangely lacking.

But not for long. No country has a monopoly of brave men—lions and hares will be found under every flag—but for one quality the British soldier stands alone: his unquenchable cheerfulness and talkativeness, even though he only open his mouth to grouse. Pipes and “fags” soon appeared, and, as one might put it, conversation became general.

“I wonder if these blokes that write about horses ever had a leg across one in their lives,” remarked Trooper Pentley, looking up from a tattered magazine he had drawn from a capacious pocket and addressing the others of his section. “Just listen to this: ‘Mounted on his Clydesdale, our hero spurred into the throng, thrusting and cutting like one of the old-time knights!’ I’d like to have seen him spurring old hairy-heels. And here he goes again: ‘Caressing his gallant steed as they rested after their glorious charge, he pulled out a handful of sugar.’ Good thing the Quarterbloke didn’t spot him, but, Lord, do listen here! ‘She was a lovely creature with a satin skin, a cross between an Arab and a Suffolk Punch.’ What a pleadin’ menagerie—and he calls it ‘The Real Thing.’”

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“Wonder what the real thing *is* like,” said another trooper, sprawling full length, reins in hand, beside Pentley.

“Well, you’re likely to know fast enough,” remarked a corporal, observing a movement at the head of the column, “so shove away that liter-a-choor and stand-to.”

Slowly Pentley rose to his feet and, more from habit than from any consciousness of what he was doing, he mechanically ran a hand over his horse and saddlery, touching buckles and straps, setting the blankets straight and tightening the girth. “Poor old lady,” he said, affectionately patting his horse’s neck, “it’s damn little sugar *we* see, and as for your satin skin, well, never mind, we’ll gallop over a bit of green stuff again some day. I wonder what the real thing *will* be like,” he mused. “Seems funny to enlist to fight the Germans and then to find yourself out here in this godless stinking desert, chasing a crowd of blasted Christy Minstrels who are never ten minutes in one place. I feel queer to-day, I don’t think I’ll be afraid—no, I’m not afraid—I never was a funk. I stood up to Shady Sutton and beat him easy, though he could give me a stone.” The thought of being at last close to the actuality of fighting made him

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grope in his mind for something to hold on to and which he could not find.

When the order "Mount!" rang down the column, for "Prepare to mount" and other "book" commands do not find their way into the desert, his movements were still mechanical and his thoughts far away.

Signs of something doing were becoming evident, and presently all eyes were looking across at a little cloud of dust on the right flank which soon resolved itself into a mounted man galloping all out back to the column. Now messages are not delivered to the rank and file, but in the halt that followed the galloper's arrival, with the uncanny telepathy that pervades units in action, it became known that the right flank guard had "found" and had been fired on. That no firing had been heard was not astonishing: mounted troops moving in level country throw their scouts far afield and the racket of a moving column quickly drowns the noise of rifles unless close at hand.

The adjutant galloped past.

"Cheero! we're for it!" said Pentley's neighbour, and the squadron moved out to the threatened flank in column of troops. Breaking into a canter, they opened out in extended order.



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For a mile or two nothing happened to break the monotonous hammering of shod feet on rocky ground, for, be it remembered, the desert is not all sand, and where the wind has cleared the surface off the rocky subsoil the "going" resembles riding on pavement, except that pavement is generally reasonably smooth.

Galloping fast ahead was an officer with two troopers on that most delicate of all cavalry jobs, advance guard to a rapidly moving body with no fixed objective. And what has so often happened, happened now. Slightly altering direction, the squadron quickly lost the line of the advanced scouts, who, noticing the change, had to gallop hard, almost at right angles across the squadron front, to take up direction again. At that moment a single rifle went off, followed apparently from nowhere by a rapid fusillade.

It is a singular fact that, firing from a lying position at mounted men, the marksman more often than not misses clean, and this time the whine of the bullets overhead was nowhere answered by that sickening smack which tells that a bullet has found its billet, and seemed to show that there is some truth in the saying that it takes a ton of lead to kill a man.



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“Steady now, men, steady!” said a recently promoted and over-anxious sergeant.

Although his interjection was quite impersonal, and probably addressed as much to himself as to anyone else, one or two hearty lads who thought it conveyed a reflection on them, or that the remark was quite uncalled for, found time in the hurly-burly to reply after the fashion of Raleigh’s classic flourish of trumpets with which he answered the massed guns at Cadiz.

Wheeling to their right flank, the horsemen swung on in good order till they reached one of the shallow arms of an enormous wadi which gradually dipped and widened into what looked for all the world like a gigantic prehistoric quarry.

For the reason explained, it was gratifying, though not astonishing, to find that no one had been hit, although, had the warrior who loosed off first been able to keep his trigger finger quiet a few moments longer, the toll might have been different.

Having found good cover for their horses in the wadi, the now dismounted troopers lined the rim of their shelter, while the squadron leader himself went out to reconnoitre.

*Sotto voce*—more or less—the men cracked jokes and “chipped” each other, indifferent to a

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desultory fire from the enemy, for the legend of the Briton's tendency to laugh in the jaws of death itself is no myth. But while the man next to him was blithely humming an old music hall chorus, Pentley lay gazing fixedly at the grey ground in front of him. Glancing sideways to see if he were observed, he stealthily felt his pulse—no, it was quite steady. "What is it that's wrong with me to-day?" he pondered. "I feel exactly as if I had eaten nothing for weeks. They've stopped firing—how quiet everything has gone—how long have we been lying here—I wonder what the others are feeling like? Good God! There was a man—was it Cornfoot? Yes, old Bill Cornfoot—actually yawning! Ah! there's the major coming back—wonder what he's going to do—hope he gets a move on soon, it's this damned waiting that's getting on my nerves. I know I'll be all right when we get into it."

In tense silence, forgetting in their keenness that they had ever in their lives been told how vital it was to always "look to your front," every pair of eyes was directed on the major and his second-in-command, now in earnest consultation. After exchanging a few words, the squadron leader told a man to mount and handed him a hastily scribbled

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message with the words: "Back to the colonel; gallop like hell." Somewhat superfluous, for as the trooper scrambled his horse out of the far side of the dip he was saluted with a scatter of shots from the ever watchful enemy which sent him off like a streak to the main body.

"Mount—draw swords!" came the order.

"Swords!" whispered Pentley. "Then it's to be the real thing after all!"

In column of sections the squadron set off down the wadi, its sides gradually rising steeply on each hand. "Gallop!" was signalled, and away they went. The intention was clear: down one arm and up another, taking the Arabs in their rear, to drive them out. But the son of the desert leads too precarious and watchful an existence to be easily caught asleep, and from the safe cover of the rocky sides unsuspected snipers kept up a galling fire on the little band. Well for them that they were horsemen before they were soldiers, for they were galloping over ground that no sane man would have cared to walk a horse through in cold blood. But risks must be taken in war, and victory follows the leader who makes his chance more often than he who merely takes it when it presents itself. Jumping the smaller rocks, swerving round the

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boulders, cursing when a horse stumbled, jesting when the other fellows did, losing formation and finding it again, the squadron pressed on, and at last Pentley found himself breasting the slope, feeling an overwhelming desire to close with the enemy and get it over.

They in the meantime had not waited. Changing front, they were already lining the edge of their saucer facing the direction of the expected attack, which their instinct told them would assuredly be sent home.

Once more on the level, rapidly forming line while on the move, with a shout the horsemen drove across and down on the Arabs.

It seemed to Pentley that he galloped for years looking at those white figures ahead, and the noise of the firing sounded like a boy drawing a stick along street railings at home.

Crash! and he was down with the worst of all things that can happen to a cavalryman in action—pinned by the leg under his dead horse. Mistily he gazed round, tried to rise, and fell back with a groan. He was helpless. Despite the sword knot, his weapon had flown from his hand and was yards away. He thought of his rifle. Vainly he reached for the bucket—every movement was torture to his



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crushed limb and brought a scream of agony to his lips.

What was happening? His thoughts raced. Where were the others? Would they come back for him? Surely they wouldn't leave him like this. The noise of the charge was leaving him. The sound of firing, the shrill cries of the Arabs mingled with the thudding of horses' feet and the shouting of his comrades died away. Half stunned with the fall and sick with pain, Pentley lay with his heart throbbing so loudly that the world seemed filled with the sound of it.

A consciousness of something indefinable made him turn his head—to see an Arab slip from behind a rock. Moving as cautiously as a cat, the Bedouin took in the situation at a glance.

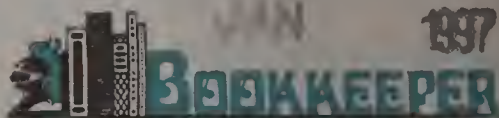
Fascinated and horror-stricken, Pentley rallied his wits and made another desperate effort to free his leg and reach his rifle. In vain, and faint with the effort he fell heavily back. Satisfied that there was no danger, the Arab crept forward with an evil grin. Licking his lips, he raised his rifle, then, on a second thought, lowered it. Cartridges are precious in the desert.

Feeling in the folds of his jibbeh, he drew a knife——





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